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# BESSY RANE

A *Nobel*

BY  
MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF  
"EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," "ROLAND YORKE,"  
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. II.



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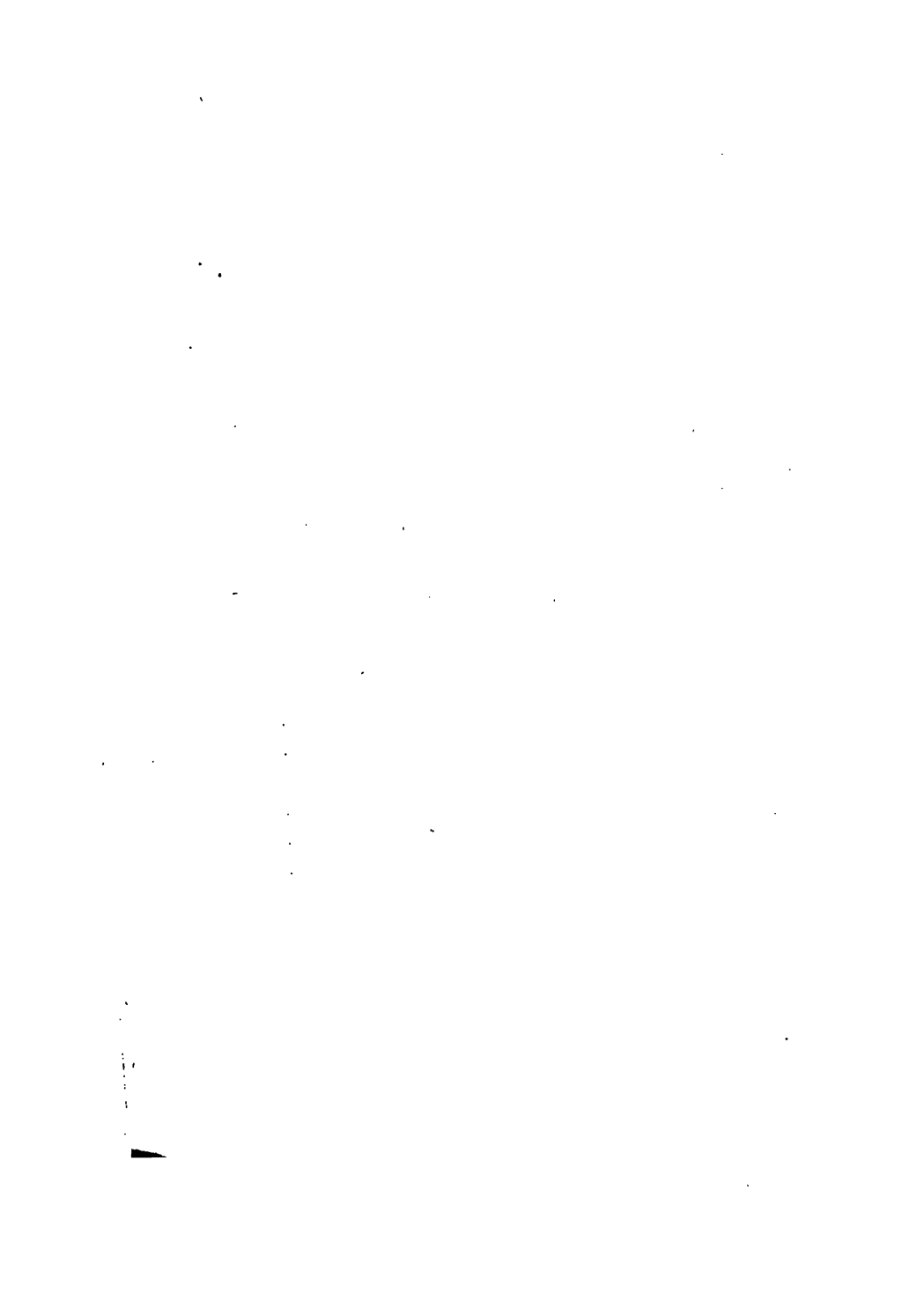


## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MORNING VISITORS . . . . .	1
II. THREE LETTERS FOR DR. RANE . . . . .	18
III. MADAM'S ADVICE . . . . .	34
IV. MARY DALLORY . . . . .	52
V. LOVE AMONG THE ROSES . . . . .	73
VI. THE TONTINE . . . . .	88
VII. AT THE SEA-SIDE . . . . .	110
VIII. A LAST PROPOSAL . . . . .	129
IX. AT NIGHT : UNDER THE CEDAR-TREE . . . . .	149
X. A SECOND FLY AT THE DOOR . . . . .	172
XI. A PANIC . . . . .	192
XII. WHAT JELLY SAW . . . . .	215
XIII. DESOLATION . . . . .	236
XIV. IN THE CHURCHYARD . . . . .	261
XV. IN HIS SICK ROOM . . . . .	275
XVI. JELLY'S TROUBLES . . . . .	283
XVII. COMING HOME TO DIE . . . . .	300





# BESSY RANE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MORNING VISITORS.

IN the dining-parlour at Mrs. Cumberland's, with its large window open to the garden and the sweet flowers, stood Ellen Adair. It was the favourite morning-room. Mrs. Cumberland, up in good time to-day, for it was barely eleven o'clock, had stepped forth into the garden, and had disappeared amid its remoter parts.

Ellen Adair, wearing a dress of cool pink muslin, almost as thin as gauze, stood in a reverie. A pleasant one, to judge by the soft blush on her face and the sweet smile that parted her lips. She was twirling the plain gold ring round and round her finger, thinking no doubt of the hour when it was put on, and the words spoken with it. Bessy Rane

had wholly refused to give back the ring she was married with, and Ellen retained the other.

The intimacy with Arthur Bohun, the silent love-making, had been going on always. Even now, she was listening lest haply his footsteps might be heard ; listening with hushed breath and beating heart. Never a day passed but he contrived to call, on some plea or other, at Mrs. Cumberland's, morning, afternoon, or evening : and this morning he might be coming, for aught she knew. At the close of the past summer, Mrs. Cumberland had gone to the Isle of Wight for change of air, taking Ellen and her maid Jelly. She hired a secluded cottage in the neighbourhood of Niton. Singular to say, Captain Bohun remembered that he had friends at Niton—an old invalid brother officer, who was living there in great economy. On and off, on and off, during the whole time of Mrs. Cumberland's stay—and that lasted five months, for she had gone the beginning of September, and did not come home until the end of February—was Arthur Bohun paying visits to this old friend. Now for a day or two ; now for a week or two ; once for three weeks together. And still Mrs.

Cumberland suspected nothing! It was as if her eyes were held. Perhaps they were: there is a destiny in all things, and it must be worked out. It is true that she did not see or suspect half the intimacy. A gentle walk once a day by the sea was all she took. At other times Ellen rambled at will; sometimes attended by Jelly, alone when Jelly could not be spared. Captain Bohun took every care of her, guarding her more jealously than he would have guarded a sister: and this did a little surprise Mrs. Cumberland.

"We ought to feel obliged to Captain Bohun, Ellen," she said on one occasion. "It's not many a young man would sacrifice his time to us. Your father, and his, and my husband the chaplain, were warm friends for a little time in India: it must be the knowledge of that that induces him to be so attentive. Very civil of him!"

Ellen coloured vividly. Eminently truthful, of a nature antagonistic to deceit, she yet did not dare to say that perhaps that was *not* Captain Bohun's reason for being attentive. How could she hint at Captain Bohun's love, plain though it was to her own heart, when he had never spoken a syllable to her about

it? It was not impossible. So things went on in the same routine: he and she wandering together on the sea-shore; both of them living in a dream of Elysium. In February, when they returned home, the scene was changed, but not the companionship. It was an early spring that year, warm and genial. Many and many an hour were they together in that seductive garden of Mrs. Cumberland's, with its miniature rocks, its mossy grass soft as velvet; the birds would be singing and their own hearts dancing. But Mrs. Cumberland's eyes were not to be always closed.

It was scarcely to be expected that so good-looking a girl as Ellen Adair, should remain long without a declared suitor. Especially when there was a rumour that she would have a fortune—though how the latter arose, or whence its grounds, people would have been puzzled to tell. A gentleman of good position in the vicinity; no other than Mr. Graves, son of one of the county members; took to make rather pointed visits at Mrs. Cumberland's. That his object was Ellen Adair, and that he would most likely be asking her to become his wife, Mrs. Cumberland

saw. She wrote to Mr. Adair in Australia, telling him she thought Ellen was about to receive an offer of marriage, eligible in every way. The young man was of high character, good family, and large means, she said : should she, if the proposal came, accept it for Ellen. By a singular omission, which perhaps Mrs. Cumberland was not conscious of, she did not mention Mr. Graves's name. But the proposal came sooner than Mrs. Cumberland had bargained for : barely was this letter despatched—about which in her characteristic reticence, she said not a word to anybody—when Mr. Graves spoke to Ellen and was refused. It was this that opened Mrs. Cumberland's eyes to the nature of the friendship between Ellen and Captain Bohun. She then wrote a second letter to Mr. Adair, saying Ellen had refused Mr. Graves in consequence, as she strongly suspected, of an attachment to Arthur Bohun—the son of Major Bohun, whom Mr. Adair once knew so well. That Arthur Bohun would be wishing to make Ellen his wife, there could be, Mrs. Cumberland thought from observation, no doubt : might he be accepted ? In a worldly point of view, Captain Bohun was not so desirable as

Mr. Graves, she added—unless indeed he should succeed to his uncle's baronetcy, which was not very improbable, the present heir being sickly—but he would have enough to live upon as a gentleman, and he was liked by every one. This second letter was also despatched to Australia by the mail following the one that took the first. Having thus done her duty, Mrs. Cumberland sat down to wait placidly for Mr. Adair's answer, tacitly allowing the intimacy to continue, inasmuch as she did not stop the visits of Arthur Bohun. Neither he nor Ellen suspected what she had done.

And with the summer weather there had come in another suitor to Ellen Adair. At least another was displaying signs that he would like to become one. It was Mr. Seeley, the doctor who had replaced Mr. Alexander. Soon after Mrs. Cumberland's return from Niton in February, she had been for a week or two alarmingly ill, and Mr. Seeley was called in as well as her son. He had continued to be on terms of friendship at her house; and it became rather palpable that he very very much admired Miss Adair.

Things were in this state on this summer's

morning, and Ellen Adair stood near the window twirling round and round the plain gold ring on her finger. Presently she came out of her reverie, unlocked a small letter-case, and began to write in her diary.

"Tuesday. Mrs. Cumberland talks of going away again. She seems to me to get thinner and weaker. Arthur says the same. He ——"

A knock at the front door, and Mr. Seeley was shown in. He paid a professional visit to Mrs. Cumberland at least every other morning. Not as a professional man, he told her; but as a friend, that he might see how she went on.

Miss Adair shook hands with him, her clasp and her manner alike cold. He saw it not; and his fingers parted lingeringly from hers.

"Mrs. Cumberland is in the garden, if you will go to her, Mr. Seeley," said Ellen, affecting to be quite occupied with her letter-case. "I think she wants to see you; she is not at all well. You will find her in the grotto: or somewhere about."

To this semi-command Mr. Seeley answered nothing, except that he was in no hurry, and would look after Mrs. Cumberland by-and-



by. He was a dark man of about two-and-thirty, with a plain, honest face; straightforward in disposition and manner, timid only when with Ellen Adair. He took a step or two nearer Ellen, and began to address her in a low tone, pulling one of his gloves about nervously.

"I have been wishing for an opportunity of speaking to you, Miss Adair. There is a question that I—that I—should like to put. One I have very much at heart."

It was coming. In spite of Ellen Adair's studious coldness to him, by which she had meant him to take a lesson and learn that he must *not* speak, she saw that it was coming. In the pause he made, as if he would wait for her permission to go on, she felt miserably uncomfortable. Her nature was essentially generous and sensitive: to have to refuse Mr. Seeley, or any one else, made her feel as humiliated as though she had committed a crime. And she could have esteemed the man apart from this.

They were thus standing: Mr. Seeley looking awkward and nervous, tearing at his glove as no sane man would do; Ellen turning red and white and hot and cold: when Arthur

Bohun walked in. Mr. Seeley, effectually interrupted for the time, muttered a good morning to Captain Bohun and shot into the garden.

"What was Seeley saying, Ellen?"

"Nothing," she rather faintly answered.

"*Nothing!*"

Ellen glanced up at him. His face wore the haughty Bohun look; his mouth betrayed scorn enough for ten of the proud Bohuns put together. She did not answer.

"If he were saying 'nothing,' why should you be looking as you did?—with a great hot blush on your face, and your eyes cast down?"

"He had really said as good as nothing, Arthur. What he might have been going to say, I—I don't know. It was only that minute he had come in."

"As you please," coldly returned Arthur, walking into the garden in his turn. "If you do not think me worthy of your confidence, I have no more to say."

The Bohun blood was bubbling up in a fierce turmoil. Not in doubt of Ellen; not in resentment against her—at least only so in the moment's passion: but in angry indigna-

tion that Seeley, a common village practitioner, should dare to lift his profane eyes to Ellen Adair. Captain Bohun had suspected the man's hopes for some short time; there's an instinct in these things; and felt outrageous over it. Tom Graves's venture had filled him with resentment; but he at least was a gentleman of position.

Ellen, wonderfully disturbed, gently sat down to write again; all she did was gentle. And the diary got some sentences added to it.

"That senseless William Seeley! And after showing him as plainly as I could show, that it is useless—that I should consider it an impertinence in him to attempt to speak to me. I don't know whether it was for the worst or the best that Arthur should have come in just at that moment. For the best because it stopped Mr. Seeley's nonsense; for the worst because Arthur has now seen and is vexed. The vexation will not last, for he knows better. Here they are."

Once more Ellen closed her diary. The "Here they are," applied to the doctor and Mrs. Cumberland. They were walking slowly towards the window, conversing calmly on her

ailments, and came in. Mrs. Cumberland sat down with her newspaper. As Mr. Seeley took his departure to visit other patients, Arthur Bohun returned. Close upon that, Richard North was shown in. It seemed that Mrs. Cumberland was to be rich in visitors that morning.

That Richard North should find his time hang somewhat on hand, was only natural; he, the hitherto actively-employed man, who had often wished the day's hours to be doubled, for the business he had to do in it. Richard could afford to make morning calls on his friends now, and he had come strolling to Mrs. Cumberland's.

They sat down. Arthur in the remotest chair he could find from Ellen Adair: she had taken up a bit of light work, and her fairy fingers were plying its threads deftly. Richard sat near Ellen, facing Mrs. Cumberland. He could not help thinking how lovely Ellen Adair was: the fact had never struck him more forcibly than to-day.

"How is the strike getting on, Richard?"

Mrs. Cumberland laid down her newspaper to ask the question. No other theme bore so much present interest in Dallory. From the

time that North and Gass first established the works, things had gone on with one continuous smoothness, peace and plenty reigning on all sides. No wonder this startling innovation seemed like a revolution.

"It is *going* on," replied Richard. "How the men are getting on, I don't like to think. The wrong way of course."

"Your proposition, to meet them half-way, was rejected, I hear."

"It was."

"What do they expect to come to?"

"To fortune, I should fancy," returned Richard. "To abjure work and *not* expect a fortune, must be rather a mistake. A poor look-out at the best."

"But, according to the newspapers, Richard, one half of the working classes that the country contains are out on strike. Do you believe it?"

"A vast number are out. And more are going out daily."

"And what is to become of them all?"

"I cannot tell. The question, serious though it is, appears never to occur to the men or their rulers."

"The journals say—living so much alone

as I do, I have time to read many, and I make it my chief recreation—that the work is leaving the country,” pursued Mrs. Cumberland.

“And so it is. It cannot be otherwise. Take a case of my own as an example. A contract was offered me some days ago, and I could not take it. Literally *could not*, Mrs. Cumberland. My men are out on strike, and likely to be out; I had no means of performing it, and therefore could only reject it. That contract, as I happen to know, has been taken by a firm in Belgium. They have undertaken it at a cheaper rate than I could possibly have done at the best of times; for labour there is cheaper. It is true. The work that circumstances compelled me to refuse, is gone over there to be executed, and I and my men are playing in idleness.”

“But what will be the end of it?” asked Mrs. Cumberland.

“The end of it? If you speak of the country, neither you nor I can foresee.”

“I spoke of the men. Not your men in particular, Mr. Richard North, but all those that we include under the name of British workmen: the vast bodies of artizans scattered

in the various localities of the kingdom. What is to become of these men if the work fails ? ”

“ I see but one of three courses for them,” said Richard, lifting his hand in some agitation, for he spoke from the depth of his heart, believing the subject to be of more awful gravity than any that had stirred the community for some hundreds of years. “ They must eventually emigrate—provided that the means to do so can be found ; or they must become burdens upon the public charity ; or they must lie down in the streets and starve. As I live, I can foresee no better fate for them.”

“ And what of the country, if it comes to this?—if the work and the workmen leave it?”

Richard North shrugged his shoulders. It was altogether a question too difficult for him. He would have liked to get it answered from somebody else very much indeed : just as others would.

“ Lively conversation ! ” interposed Captain Bohun, in a half-satirical, half-joking manner, as he rose. It was the first time he had spoken. “ I think I must be going,” he added, approaching Mrs. Cumberland.

Richard made it the signal for his own departure. As they stood, saying adieu, Bessy Rane was seen for a moment at her own window. Mrs. Cumberland nodded.

"There's Bessy," exclaimed Richard. "I think I'll go and speak to her. Will you pardon me, Mrs. Cumberland, if I make my exit from your house this way?"

Mrs. Cumberland stepped outside herself, and Richard crossed the low wire fence that divided the two gardens. Arthur Bohun went to the door, never having said a word of farewell to Ellen Adair. He stood with it in his hand looking at her, smiled, and was returning, when Mrs. Cumberland came in again.

"Won't you come and say adieu to me here, Ellen?"

The invitation was given in so low a tone that she gathered it by the form of his lips rather than by the ear; perhaps by instinct also. She went out, and they walked side by side in silence to the open hall door. Dallory Ham, in its primitive ways and manners, left its house-doors open with perfect safety by day to admit the summer air. Outside, between the house and the gate, was a strip of a bed planted with flowers. Arrived



at the door, Captain Bohun could find nothing better to talk of than these, as he stood with her on the crimson mat.

"I think those lilies are finer than Mr. North's."

"Mrs. Cumberland takes so much pains with her flowers," was Ellen's answer. "And she is very fond of lilies."

They stepped out, bending over these self-same lilies. Ellen picked one. He quietly took it from her.

"Forgive me, Ellen," he murmured. "I am not a bear in general. Good bye."

As they stood, her hand in his for the parting greeting, her flushed face downcast, shrinking in maiden modesty from the gaze of love that was bent upon her, Mrs. North's open carriage rolled past. The head of Madam was suddenly pushed as far towards them as safety permitted; her eyes glared; a stony horror sat on her countenance.

"Shameful! Disgraceful!" hissed Madam. And Miss Matilda North, by her side, started up to see what the shame might be.

Arthur Bohun had caught the words and the hiss—not Ellen—and bit his lips in a complication of feeling.

But all he did was to raise his hat—first to his mother, then to Ellen—as he went out at the gate. Madam flung herself back on her seat, and the carriage pursued its course up the Ham.

## CHAPTER II.

### THREE LETTERS FOR DR. RANE.

“YOU are keeping quality hours, Bessy—as our nurse used to say when we were children,” was Richard North’s salutation to his sister as he went in and saw the table laid for breakfast.

Mrs. Rane laughed. She was busy at work, sewing some buttons on a white waistcoat of her husband’s.

“Oliver was called out at seven this morning, and has not come back yet,” she explained.

“And you are waiting breakfast for him! You must be starving.”

“I took a piece of bread-and-butter and some coffee when Molly had hers. How is papa, Richard?”

“Anything but well. Very much worried, for one thing.”

"Madam and Matilda are back, I hear?" continued Bessy.

"Three days ago. They have brought Miss Field with them."

"And Madam has brought her usual temper, I suppose," added Bessy. "No wonder papa is suffering."

"That of course; it will never be otherwise. But he is troubling himself also very much about the works being stopped. I tell him to leave all such trouble to me, but it is of no use."

"When will the strike end, Richard?"

Richard shook his head. It was an unprofitable theme, and he did not wish to pursue it with Bessy. She had enough cares of her own, as he suspected, without their being added to. Three letters lay on the table, close by where Richard was sitting; they were addressed to Dr. Rane. His fingers began turning them about mechanically, quite in abstraction.

"I know the handwriting of two of them," remarked Bessy, possibly fancying he was curious on the point; "not of the third."

"The one is from America," observed

Richard, looking at the letters for the first time.

“ Yes ; it’s from Dr. Jones. He would like Oliver to join him in America.”

“ To join him for what ? ” asked Richard.

Bessy looked at him. She saw no reason why her brother should not be told. Dr. Rane wished it kept secret from the world ; but this, she thought, could not apply to her good and trustworthy brother Richard. She opened her heart and told him all ; not what they were going certainly to do, for ways and means lay in doubt yet, but what they hoped to be able to do. Richard, excessively surprised, listened in silence.

They made up their minds to quit Dallory. Dr. Rane had taken a dislike to the place ; and no wonder, Bessy added in a parenthesis, when he was not getting on at all. He intended to leave it as soon as ever the practice was disposed of.

“ I expect this letter will decide it,” concluded Bessy, touching one that bore the London post-mark. “ It is from a Mr. Lynch, who is wishing to get a practice in the country on account of his health. London smoke does not do for him, he tells Oliver. They have

had a good deal of correspondence together, and I know his handwriting quite well. Oliver said he expected to get his decision to-day or to-morrow. He is to pay £200 and take to the furniture at a valuation."

"And then—do I understand you arightly, Bessy?—you and Rane are going to America?" questioned Richard.

"Oh, *no*," said Bessy with emphasis. "I must have explained badly, Richard. What I said was, that Dr. Jones, who has more practice in America than he knows what to do with, had offered a share of it to Oliver if he would go and join him. Oliver declined it. He would have liked to go, for he thinks it must be an exceedingly good thing; but Dr. Jones wants a large premium; so it's out of the question."

"But surely you would not have liked to emigrate, Bessy?"

She glanced into Richard's face with her meek, loving eyes, blushing a very little.

"I would go anywhere that he goes," she answered simply. "It would cost me pain to leave you and papa, Richard; especially papa, because he is old, and because he would feel it; but Oliver is my husband."

Richard drummed for a minute or two on the table-cloth. Bessy sewed on her last button.

"Then where does Rane think of pitching his tent, Bessy?"

"Somewhere in London. He says there's no place like it for getting on. Should this letter be to say that Mr. Lynch takes the practice, we shall be away in less than a month."

"And you have never told us!"

"We decided to say nothing until it was a settled thing; and then only to you, and Mrs. Cumberland, and papa. Oliver does not want the world to know it sooner than need be."

"But do you mean to say that Rane has not told his mother?" responded Richard to this in some surprise.

"Not yet," said Bessy, shaking out the completed waistcoat. "It will be sure to vex her, and perhaps needlessly; for, suppose, after all, we do not go? That entirely depends upon the disposal of the practice here."

Bessy was picking up the threads in her neat way, and putting the remaining buttons in the little closed box, when Dr. Rane was heard to enter and go into his consulting-

room. Away flew Bessy to the kitchen, bringing in the things with her own loving hands—and, for the matter of that, Molly Green was at her up-stairs work—buttered toast, broiled ham, a dainty dish of stewed mushrooms. There was nothing she liked so much as to wait on her husband. Her step was light and soft, her eye bright. Richard, looking on, saw how much she cared for him.

Dr. Rane came in, wiping his brow; the day was hot, and he tired. He had walked from a farm-house a mile beyond the Ham. A strangely-weary look sat on his face.

“Don’t trouble Bessy; I have had my breakfast. Ah, Richard, how d’ye do?”

“You have had your breakfast!” repeated Bessy. “At the farm?”

“Yes; they gave me some.”

“Oh, dear! won’t you eat a bit of the ham, or of the mushrooms, Oliver? They are so good. And I waited.”

“I am sorry you should wait. No, I can’t eat two breakfasts. You must eat for me and yourself, Bessy.”

Dr. Rane sat down in his own chair at the table, turning it towards Richard, and took up the letters. Selecting the one from



Mr. Lynch, he was about to open it when Bessy, who was now beginning her breakfast, spoke.

"Oliver, I have told Richard about it—what we think of doing."

Dr. Rane's glance went out for a moment to his brother-in-law's, and met it. He made the best of the situation, smiled gaily, and put down the letter unopened.

"Are you surprised, Richard?" he asked.

"Very much, indeed. Had a stranger told me I was going to leave Dallory myself—and, indeed, that may well come to be, with this strike in the air—I'd as soon have believed it. Shall you be doing well to go, do you think, Rane?"

"Am I doing well here?" was the doctor's rejoinder.

"Not very, I fear."

"And, with this strike on, it gets all the worse. The wives and children get ill, as usual, and I am called in; but the men have no money wherewith to pay me. I don't intend to bring Bessy to a crust, and I think it would come to that if we stayed here——"

"No, no; not quite to that, Oliver," she interposed. But he took no notice.

"Therefore I shall try my fortune elsewhere," continued Dr. Rane. "And if you would return thanks to the quarter whence the blow has originally come, you must pay them to your step-mother, Richard. It is she who has driven me away."

Richard was silent. Dr. Rane broke the seal of Mr. Lynch's letter, and read it to the end. Then, laying it down, he took up the one from America, and read that. Bessy, looking across, tried to gather some information from his countenance; but Dr. Rane's face was one which, in an ordinary way, it was no easier to read than a stone.

"Is it favourable news, Oliver?" she asked, as he finished the long letter, and folded it.

"It's nothing particular. Jones runs on upon politics. He generally gives me a good dose of *them*."

"Oh, I meant from Mr. Lynch," replied Bessy. "Is he coming?"

"Mr. Lynch declines."

"Declines, Oliver!"

"Declines the negotiation. And he is not much better than a sneak for giving me all the trouble that he has, and then crying off at the eleventh hour," added Dr. Rane.

"It is bad behaviour," said Bessy, warmly.  
"What excuse does he make?"

"You can see what he says," said Dr. Rane, pushing the letter towards her. Bessy opened it, and read it aloud for the benefit of Richard.

Mr. Lynch took up all one side with apologies. The substance of the letter was, that a practice had unexpectedly been offered to him at the sea-side, which he had accepted, as the air and locality would suit his state of health so much better than Dallory. If he could be of service in negotiating with any one else, he added, Dr. Rane was to make use of him.

It was as courteous and explanatory a letter as could be written. But still it was a refusal: and the negotiation was at an end. Bessy Rane drew a deep breath: whether of relief or disappointment it might have puzzled herself to decide. Perhaps there lay in it a mixture of both.

"Then, after all, Oliver, we shall not be leaving!"

"Not at present, it seems," was Dr. Rane's answer. And he put the two letters into his pocket.

"Perhaps you will be thinking again, Oliver, of America, now?" said his wife.

"Oh no I shall not."

"Does Dr. Jones still urge you to come?"

"Not particularly. He took my refusal for final."

She went on, slowly eating some of the mushrooms. Richard said nothing: this projected removal seemed to have impressed him to silence. Dr. Rane took up the remaining letter and turned it about, looking at the outside.

"Do you know the writing, Oliver?" his wife asked.

"Not at all. The post-mark's Whitborough."

Opening the letter, which appeared to contain only a few lines, Dr. Rane looked up with an exclamation.

"How strange! How very strange! Bessy, you and I are the only two left in the tontine."

"What!" she cried, scarcely understanding him. Richard North turned his head.

"That tontine that we were both put in when infants. There was only one life left in it besides ours—old Massey's son of Whitborough. He is dead."

"What!—George Massey? Dead!" cried Richard North.

Dr. Rane handed him the note. Yes: it was even so. The other life had dropped, and Oliver Rane's and his wife's alone remained.

"My father has called that an unlucky tontine," remarked Richard. "I have heard it said that if you want a child to live, you should put it in a tontine, for the tontine lives are sure to arrive at a green old age, to the mutual general mortification. This has been an exception to the rule. I am sorry about George Massey. I wonder what he has died of?"

"Last long, in general, do you say?" returned Dr. Rane, musingly. "I don't know much about tontines myself."

"Neither do I," said Richard. "I remember hearing talk of one tontine when I was a boy: five or six individuals were left in it, all over eighty then, and in flourishing health. Perhaps that was why my father and Mr. Gass took up with one. At any rate, it seems that you and Bessy are the only two remaining in this."

"I wonder if a similar condition of things ever existed before as for a man and his wife

to be the two last in a tontine?" cried Dr. Rane, slightly laughing. "Bessy, practically it can be of no use to us conjointly; for before the money can be paid, one of us must die. What senseless things tontines are!"

"Senseless indeed," answered Bessy. "I'd say something to it if we could have the money now. How much is it?"

"Ay, by the way, how much is it? What was it that each member put in at first, Richard? I forget.—Fifty pounds, was it? And then there's the compound interest, which has been going on for thirty years. How much would it amount to now?"

"More than two thousand pounds," answered Richard North, making a mental calculation.

Dr. Rane's face flushed with a quick hot flush: a light shone in his eye: his lips parted, as with some deep emotions. "More than two thousand pounds!" he echoed under his breath. "Two thousand pounds! Bessy, it would be like a gold mine."

She laughed slightly. "But we can't get it, you see, Oliver. And I am sure neither of us wishes the other dead."

"No—no; certainly not," said Dr. Rane.

Richard North said, "Good day," and left. Just before turning in at the gates of Dallory Hall, he met a gig containing Lawyer Dale of Whitborough, who was driving somewhere with his clerk ; no other than Timothy Wilks. Mr. Dale pulled up, to speak.

"Can it be true that George Massey is dead?" questioned Richard as they were parting.

"It's true enough, poor fellow. He died yesterday : been ill but two days."

"I've just heard it at Dr. Rane's. He got a letter this morning to tell him."

"Dr. Rane did? I was not aware they knew each other."

"No more did they. But they were both in that tontine. Now that George Massey's gone, Dr. Rane and his wife are the only two remaining in it. Rather singular that it should be so."

For a minute Mr. Dale could not recollect whether he had ever heard of this particular tontine ; although, being a lawyer, he made it his business to know everything ; and he and Richard talked of it together. Excessively singular, Lawyer Dale agreed, that a tontine should be practically useless to a man and his wife—unless one of them died.

"Very mortifying, I must say, Mr. Richard North; especially where the money would be welcome. Two thousand pounds! Dr. Rane must wish the senseless thing at Hanover. I should, I know, if it were my case. Good morning."

And quiet Timothy Wilks, across whom they talked, heard all that was said, and unconsciously treasured it up in his memory.

Richard carried home the news to his father. Mr. North was seated at the table in his parlour, some papers before him. He lifted his hands in dismay.

"Dead! George Massey dead! Dick, as sure as we are here, there must be something wrong about that tontine! They'd never drop off like this, else; one after another."

"It's not much more than a week ago, sir, that I met George Massey in Whitborough, and was talking with him. To all appearance he was as healthy and likely to live as I am."

"What took him off?"

"Dale says it was nothing more than a neglected cold."

"I don't like it; Dick, I don't like it," reiterated Mr. North. "Bessy may be the next to go; or Rane."



"I hope not, father."

"Well—I've had it in my head for ever so long that that tontine is an unlucky one; I think it is going to be so to the end. We shall see. Look here, Dick."

He pointed to some of the papers before him; used cheques, apparently; pushing them towards his son.

"They sent me word at the bank that my account was over-drawn. I knew it could not be, and asked for my cheques. Dick, here are four or five that I never drew."

Richard took them in his fingers. The filling-up was in Madam's handwriting: the signature apparently in Mr. North's.

"Do you give Mrs. North blank cheques ready signed, sir?"

"No, never, Dick. I was cured of that, years ago. When she wants money, I sometimes let her fill in the cheque, but I never sign it beforehand."

"And you think you have not signed these?"

"Think! I know I have not. She has imitated my signature, and got the money."

Richard's face grew dark with shame; shame for his step-mother. But that Mr.

North was her husband, it would have been downright forgery : perhaps the law, if called upon, might have accounted it such now. He took time for consideration.

“Father, I think—pardon me for the suggestion—I think you had better let your private account be passed over to me. Allow it to lie in my name ; and make my signature alone available—just as it is with our business account. I see no other way of safety.”

“With all my heart ; I’d be glad to do it,” acquiesced Mr. North, “but there’s no account to pass. There’s no account to pass, Dick ; it’s overdrawn.”

## CHAPTER III.

### MADAM'S ADVICE.

A DINNER-PARTY at Dallory Hall. Arthur Bohun was in his chamber, lazily dressing for it. Not a large dinner, this : half a dozen or so, besides themselves ; and the hour six o'clock. Two gentlemen, bidden to it, would have to go away by train afterwards : on such occasions the dinner of necessity must be tolerably early.

Mr. North and Richard did not approve of Madam's dinners at the most favourable times : now, with all the care of the strike upon them and the great trouble looming in the distance if that strike lasted, the breaking up of their business, the decay of their means, they looked on these fast-recurring banquets as most reprehensible. They were without power to stop them ; remonstrance availed not with Madam. Sometimes the dinners

were impromptu, or nearly so, Madam inviting afternoon callers at the Hall to stay, or bringing home a carriage-full of guests with her. As was partially the case on this day.

Captain Arthur Bohun, who liked to take most things easily, dressing included, stood hair-brush in hand. He had drawn aside from the glass, and was looking from the open window. His thoughts were busy. They ran on that little episode of the morning, when Madam, passing in her carriage, had seen him with Ellen Adair, and had chosen to make display of her sentiments on the subject in the manner described. That it would not end there, Arthur felt sure; Madam would inevitably treat him to a little more of her mind. It was rather a singular thing—as if Fate had been intervening with its usual cross purposes—for circumstances so to have ordered it that Madam should still be in ignorance of their intimacy. Nearly always when Mrs. Cumberland was at home, it chanced that Madam was away; and, when Madam was at the Hall, Mrs. Cumberland was elsewhere. Thus, during Mrs. Cumberland's prolonged stay at Niton, Madam's presence blessed her household; the very week that that lady returned

to Dallory Ham, Madam took her departure, and had but recently returned. She had spent the interval in Germany. Sidney North, her well-beloved son, giving trouble as usual to all who were connected with him, had found England rather warm in early spring, and had betaken himself to Germany. His chief point of sojourn was Homburg, and Madam, with her daughter Matilda, had been making it hers since the spring. Mr. North, in the glad relief her absence brought him, had used every exertion to supply her with the money she so rapaciously sent home for. It would appear that the accommodation had not been sufficient, for—as was soon to be discovered by Richard—the cheques shown to him by his father had been drawn by her at Homburg. And so, as Fate or Fortune had willed it, Mrs. North had been out of the way of watching the progress of the intimacy between her son and Ellen Adair.

A quick knock at the chamber-door, and Madam swept in, waiting for no response, a large crimson rose, just brought from the greenhouse, adorning her jet-black hair, her white silk gown rustling and trailing after her. As well as though she had already

spoken, Arthur knew what she had come for. He thought to himself that she was losing no time and must have hurried over her toilette purposely. The carriage had not long got home, for she and Matilda had been driving to a distance, and remained out to luncheon. Arthur, not moving from where he was, began brushing at his hair hap-hazard.

"I suppose I am late, Madam?"

"Was it *you* that I passed this afternoon in Dallory Ham, talking to some girl at a house-door?" began Madam, taking no notice of his remark.

"It was me, safe enough; I had been calling on Mrs. Cumberland," replied Arthur carelessly. "Dick also. By the way you stared, Madam, I fancied you scarcely knew me."

A little bit of banter. Madam might take it seriously, or not, as she chose. She went round to the other side of the dressing-table, and stood opposite to him at the window.

"What girl were you talking with?"

"Girl! I was with Miss Adair."

"Who is she, Arthur?"

"She is Mrs. Cumberland's ward."

"What do you know of her?"

"I know her as being at Mrs. Cumberland's. I see her when I go there."

Was he really indifferent? Standing there brushing away at his hair lazily, now the right way, now the wrong, speaking in the most supine manner, his apparently supreme indifference could not be exceeded. Madam scanned his face in momentary silence; *he* was closely intent upon two sparrows, fighting over a reddening cherry on the branch of the proximate tree.

"Fight away, young gentlemen; battle it out; you'll get all the better appetite for your supper."

"Will you attend to me for a short while Captain Bohun?"

"Certainly. I

"What do you know of her?"

"I know her as being at Mrs. Cumberland's. I see her when I go there."

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"Fight away, young gentlemen; battle it out; you'll get all the better appetite for your supper."

"Will you attend to me for a short while, Captain Bohun?" spoke Madam, irritably.

"Certainly; I am attending," was the Captain's ready answer.

Just for an instant Madam paused. This was not one of the daily petty grievances that she made people miserable over, but a trouble to her of awful meaning, almost as of life or death. In this, her own grave interests, she could control her temper, and she thought it might be the best policy to do so while she dealt with it.



"Arthur, you know that you are becoming more valuable to me," she said, with soft calmness; and Arthur Bohun opened his surprised ears at the words and tone. "Since Sidney took up his abode away from England, and cannot come back to it, poor fellow, for the present you are all I have here. If I speak, it is for your welfare."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," returned Arthur, seeing she waited for him to say something, and feeling how two-faced the words were, mother of his though she was. "What is it you wish to say?"

"It's about that girl, Miss—what do you call her?—Adair. Young men will be young men; soldiers especially; I know that; but wrong is wrong, and it cannot by the most ingenious sophistry be converted into right. It is quite wrong to play with these village girls, as you seem to be doing with Miss Adair."

Arthur threw back his head as though his pride were hurt. Madam had seen just the same movement in his father.

"I have no intention of *playing* with Miss Adair."

A gleam shot from her eyes—half fear, half

defiance. She bit her lip, and went on in a still softer tone.

“ You cannot mean anything *worse*, Arthur.”

“ I do not understand you, Madam. Worse ? Worse than what ?”

“ Anything serious. To play with village girls is reprehensible ; but——”

“ I beg your pardon, mother ; this is quite unnecessary. The playing with village girls—whatever that may mean—is not a habit of mine, and never has been. The caution might be more appropriate if applied to your men-servants than it is to me.”

“ Allow me to finish, Arthur. To play with village girls is reprehensible ; but to intend anything serious with one would be far more so in your case. Will you profit by the caution ?”

“ If you wish me to comprehend the word ‘serious,’ you must speak out. What does it mean ?”

“ It means *marriage*,” she answered, with a burst of temper—so far as tone might convey it. “ I allude to this absurd intimacy of yours with Miss Adair. You must be intimate with the girl ; your look and attitude, as I passed to-day, proved it.”

"And if I did mean marriage, what then?"

He asked the question jokingly, laughing a little; but he was not prepared for the effect it had on his mother. Her eyes flashed fire, her lips trembled, her face turned whiter than death.

"Marriage! With *her*? You must be dreaming, Arthur Bohun."

"Not dreaming; joking," he said, lightly.

"You may be at ease, Madam; I have no intention of marrying any one at present."

"You must never marry Miss Adair."

"No?"

"Arthur Bohun, you are treating all this with mockery," she exclaimed, beginning in truth to believe that he really was; and the relief was great, though the tacit disrespect angered her. "How dare you imply that you could think seriously of these village girls?—only to annoy and frighten me."

"You must be easily frightened to-day, Madam. I don't think I did imply it. As to Miss Adair——"

"Yes, as to Miss Adair," fiercely interrupted Madam. "Go on."

"I was about to say that, in speaking of Miss Adair, we might as well recognise her

true position. It is not quite respectful to be alluding to her as a 'village girl.' She is a lady, born and bred."

"Perhaps you will next say that she is equal to the Bohuns?"

"I do not wish to say it. Don't you think this conversation may as well cease, Madam?" added Arthur, after a short pause. "Why should it have been raised? One might suppose I had asked your consent to my marriage, whereas you know perfectly well that I am a poor man, with not the slightest chance of taking a wife."

"Poor men get engaged sometimes, Arthur, thinking they'll wait—and wait. Seeing you with that girl—the world calls her good-looking, I believe—I grew into an awful fright for your sake. It would be most disastrous for you to marry beneath your rank—a Bohun never holds up his head afterwards if he does that; and I thought I ought to speak a word of warning to you. You must take a suitable wife when you do marry—one fit to mate with the future Sir Arthur Bohun."

"To mate with plain Arthur Bohun. To

call me the future Sir Arthur is stretching possibility out very wide indeed, Madam," he added, laughing.

"Not at all. You will as surely succeed as that I am telling it you. Look at that puny James Bohun! A few years, at most, will see the last of him."

"I hope not, for his father's sake. Any way, he may live long enough to marry and leave children behind him. Is your lecture at an end, Madam?" he jestingly concluded. "If so, perhaps you may as well leave me to get my coat on, or I shall have to keep the dinner waiting."

"I have another word," said Madam; "your coat can keep. Miss Dallory dines here."

"Miss Dallory! I thought she was in Switzerland. Did she come over in a balloon to dine with us?"

"She is staying with her brother Frank. I and Matilda called at Ham Court just now and brought her with us."

"Did you bring him?"

"I did not see him; they said he was not in the way. But now why do I mention this?"

"As a bit of gossip for me, I suppose. It's very good of you. My coat and the dinner can certainly wait."

"I have brought Miss Dallory here for your sake, Arthur Bohun," was the rejoinder, spoken with emphatic meaning. "*She* is the young lady you will do well to think of as your future wife."

Madam went out of the room with much stately rustle, and swept down stairs. Another minute, and the door opened again to admit Richard North. Captain Bohun had not progressed further in dressing, or stirred from his place, but was leaning against the window-frame in abstraction, whistling softly.

"Madam's in a way, is she not?" began Richard in a low tone. "My window was open, Arthur, and I was obliged to catch a word here and there. I made all kinds of noises, but you did not take the hint."

"*She* didn't; and I would as soon you heard as not," was Captain Bohun's answer. "You are ready, I see, Dick."

"The course of true love never did run smooth, you know," said Richard, laughing.

"And never will. Whenever I read of the old patriarchal days, in which a man had only

to fix on a wife and bring her home to his tent ; and look on all that has to be considered in these—money, and suitability of family, and settlements—I wonder whether it can be the same world. Madam need not fear that I have any chance of marrying.”

“ Or you’d not be long a bachelor ?”

“ I don’t know about that.”

“ You don’t know ! Why you do know, and so do I. I’ve seen how it is for some weeks now, Arthur.”

“ Seen what ?”

Richard smiled.

“ Seen what ?”

“ How it is between you and Ellen Adair.”

“ You think you have ?”

“ Think ! You love her, don’t you ?”

Arthur Bohun put down the hair-brush gently, which he had held all the while, and moved to get his coat.

“ Dick, old fellow, whether it will come to anything between us or not I cannot tell,” he said, his voice strangely deep, his brow flushing with emotion, “ but I shall never care for any one else as I care for her.”

“ Then secure her,” answered Dick.

“ I might be tempted to do it, in spite of

my mother, had I the wherewithal to set up a home ; but I've not."

" You have more than double what Rane and Bessy have."

" Rane and Bessy ! But Bessy is one in a thousand. I couldn't ask a wife to come home to me on that."

" Just as you think fit, of course. Take care, though, you don't get her snapped up. I should fear it if it were my case. Ellen Adair is the loveliest girl I ever saw, and I think her the sweetest. I could but look at her as we sat in Mrs. Cumberland's room this morning. Other men will be finding it out, Arthur, if they have not already done so."

Arthur never answered. He had gone back to his former post, and was leaning against the window-frame, looking out dreamily.

" Madam objects, I presume ?"

" I presume she would if I put it to her," assented Arthur, as if the proposition admitted of no dispute.

" I don't see why she should, or you, either."

" I'm afraid, Dick, we Bohuns have our full share of family pride."



"But Mr. Adair is, no doubt, a gentleman?"

"Oh, yes. That is, not in trade," added Arthur, carelessly.

"Well, a gentleman is a gentleman," said Richard.

"Of course. But I take it for granted that he holds no position in the world. And we Bohuns, you know——"

Arthur stopped. Richard North laughed. "You Bohuns would like to mate only *with* position. A daughter, for example, of the Lord Lieutenant of the county."

"Exactly," assented Arthur, echoing the laugh, but very much in earnest for all that. "Madam has been recommending Miss Dallory to my notice."

"Who?" cried Richard, rather sharply.

"Mary Dallory."

"You might do worse," observed Richard, after a pause.

"No doubt of that, friend. She is down stairs."

"Who is down stairs?"

"She. So Madam has just informed me."

"There's the gong."

"And be hanged to it!" returned Arthur,

getting into his coat. "I wish to goodness Madam did not give us the trouble of putting on dinner dress every other day! Neither are entertainments seemly in your house during these troubled times."

"What's more, I don't see how they will get paid for, if the trouble continues," candidly spoke Richard. "Madam must be uncommonly sanguine to expect they can be."

• "Or careless," returned Arthur Bohun in a low tone. "Dick, my friend, it's a bad sign when a man has no good word to give his mother."

That every grain of filial affection had long gone out of his breast and been replaced by a feeling near akin to shame and contempt, Arthur Bohun was only too conscious of. He strove to be dutiful; but it was at times a hard task. Living under the same roof as his mother, her sins against good manners and good feeling were brought under his notice perpetually; he was more sensitively alive to them than even others could be.

Since Arthur Bohun had quitted the army and recovered from the long sickness that followed on his wound, Dallery Hall had been his ostensible home. Latterly he had made it

really such ; for Dallory Ham contained an attraction from which he could not tear himself. Ellen Adair had his heart's best love : and, far from her he could not wander. A pure, ardent love, honourable as every true passion must be in an honourable man, but swaying his every action with its power. Sir Nash Bohun invited him in vain. His aunt, Miss Bohun, with whom he was a great favourite, could not think why he went so rarely to see her ; or, when he did go, made his visit a flying one. Arthur Bohun possessed a few hundreds a year : about four : just enough to keep him as a gentleman ; and he had none of the bad habits that run away with young men's money. Miss Bohun would leave him fairly off when she died : so he was at ease on the score of the future. One day, after he had been at Dallory Hall for a few months, he put a hundred-pound bank-note into Richard North's hands.

"What is this for ?" questioned Richard.

Arthur told him. The embarrassments in the Hall's financial department (caused by Madam) were lightly touched on : this was Arthur's contribution towards his own share of the cost. In the surprise of the moment

Richard North's spirit rose, and fought at it. Arthur quietly persisted.

"As long as I pitch myself among you in the home tent here, I shall hand over this sum every six months. To you, Dick : there's nobody else to be trusted with it. If I gave it to Bessy, she would be safe to speak of it, and it might be wiled out of her."

"I never heard of such nonsense in my life," cried Richard. "You will not get me to take it. I'd not countenance anything of the kind."

"Yes you will, Dick. You'd not like me to take up my abode at the 'Dallory Arms.' I declare on my honour I shall do so, if I am forced to be as a guest at the Hall."

"But, Arthur ——"

"Dick, my friend, there's no need of argument. I mean what I say. Don't drive me away. The 'Dallory Arms' would not be very comfortable as a home ; and I should drift away, goodness knows where."

"As if one inmate, more or less, made any difference in our home expenses."

"As if it did not. I have no right or claim whatever to be living on your father. Don't make me small in my own eyes, frère Richard.

You know that you'd feel the same in my place, and do the same. No one need know of this but our two selves, Dick."

Richard gave in : he saw that Arthur was resolute : and, after all, it was just. So he took the bank-note to account, and told his father ; and Arthur Bohun stayed on, his conscience at peace. Once, in one of Madam's furious onslaughts of temper, when she spared nobody, she had abused her son for staying at the Hall, and living upon her. Upon *her* ! Arthur parried the attack with a careless kind of good humour, merely saying he was Dick's guest. When Dick turned him out of the Hall he should go.

## CHAPTER IV.

MARY DALLORY.

THE assembled guests waited in the drawing-room. Madam, with a face of gracious suavity, was bestowing her smiles on all, after her manner in society, her white silk dress gleaming in its richness. A slight frown crossed her brow, however, at the tardy entrance of her son and Richard North.

"We have waited for you," she rather sharply said. "Dinner has been announced."

Richard found his father did not intend to be present, and that he must act as host, which was nothing new. Glancing round the room, he was advancing to Miss Dallory—there was no married lady present save Madam—when Madam's voice rang out cold and clear.

"Take Eliza Field, Richard North. Arthur, you will conduct Miss Dallory."

Now that was all wrong according to the

rules of etiquette. Miss Dallory, the great heiress, whose family was of some note in the county, should have fallen to Richard: Eliza Field, a middle-aged lady, had only been Matilda North's governess. But Madam had a way of enforcing her own mandates; or, rather, of letting people know they might not be disputed. There was a moment's awkwardness: Richard and Arthur both stood with arrested footsteps; and then each advanced to the appointed lady. But Miss Dallory nearly upset it all: she turned away from Captain Bohun to Richard, her hand outstretched.

"How do you do, Mr. Richard North?"

He clasped it for a moment in his. Madam, who had a shrewd way of making guesses, and of seeing things that nobody else saw, had picked up a notion long ago, that had Richard North's fortunes been in the ascendant, he might have forgotten the wide gulf lying between him and Mary Dallory—she patrician-born, he plebeian—and asked her to step over it.

"I did not know you had returned, Miss Dallory, until a few minutes ago," said Richard.

“No! I have been home two days.”

They separated. Madam was sweeping on to the dining-room on the arm of a Colonel Carter, whose acquaintance she had made at Homburg, and the rest had to follow. Richard brought up the rear with Eliza Field.

Miss Dallory, a rather tall and graceful girl of two-and-twenty, sat between Arthur Bohun and Richard North. She was not particularly handsome, but very pleasing. A fair-complexioned face with plenty of good sense in it, gray eyes set rather deep in the head, and soft, dark-brown hair. Her manners were remarkably open and ready; her speech candidly independent. It was this perhaps—the pleasantness of the speech and manners—that made her a favourite with everybody.

The Dallory family were very wealthy. There were three of them; Miss Dallory and her two brothers, John and Frank, both older than herself. They had been left orphans at an early age: their father's will having bequeathed his property nearly equally among the three: the portion of it entailed on his elder son lay in another county. To the surprise of many people it was found that he had left Dallory Hall to his daughter; so that, in



point of fact, this Miss Dallory, sitting at Mr. North's dinner-table, was the owner of the house. It had been the residence of the Dallory family during Mr. Dallory's lifetime : after his death, the trustees let it on lease to Mr. North. Which lease was *purchased* : so that Mr. North had no rent to pay for it. The lease, however, had now all but terminated. Madam hoped to be able to get it renewed : perhaps that might be one of the reasons why she was now setting out to pay court to Mary Dallory. That young lady came into her property when she was one-and-twenty ; and all power lay in her own hands. Nearly two years ago Miss Dallory had gone on the continent with her aunt, Mrs. Leasom. Illness had prolonged Mrs. Leasom's stay there, and they had but just returned. Mrs. Leasom remained at her home in London ; Miss Dallory came down at once to her younger brother's house — an exceedingly pretty place just beyond the Ham. And that's enough of explanation.

The dinner progressed. Miss Dallory talked chiefly with Richard : next to whom she sat ; Arthur Bohun, on the other side, was rather silent and glum. She was telling

of her travels: and jestingly complaining of finding what she called a grand dinner, when she had thought Mrs. North was only bringing her to dine en famille—as her dress proved. Which was nothing but a coloured muslin.

“Don’t laugh at me, Mr. Richard North. If you had been living in a remote village of Switzerland for months, dining off bouilli and a thin chicken in your aunt’s chamber, you would think this grand yourself.”

“I did not laugh,” answered Richard. “It is a vast deal grander than I like.”

“Do you get it every day?”

“Nearly.”

“Where’s Mr. North?” she asked, slightly dropping her voice.

Richard shook his head. “The grandeur has tired him, Miss Dallory. He dines nearly always in his parlour: I join him as often as I can.”

“I hear he is breaking,” she continued, her deep gray eyes looking straight at Richard, pity and concern in their depths. “Frank says so.”

“He is breaking sadly. The prolonged strain is too much for him.”

Madam glanced down the table, and spoke in a tart tone.

"Are you attending to Miss Field, Richard?"

Miss Field was on his left hand; Miss Dallory on his right.

"Yes, Madam. She heard," added he to Miss Dallory, scarcely moving his lips.

"And it was high treason, I suppose," rejoined that young lady confidentially. "There have been changes in your home, Mr. Richard, since I was last here. Mr. North's first children were all in it then."

"And now two of them have gone out of it. Bessy to another home: Edmund to—his last one."

"Ah, I heard all. How sad it must have been for you and Mr. North! John and Frank wrote me word that they followed him to the grave."

"Very sad for him as well as us," assented Richard. "But he is better off."

"Who sent that wicked letter?"

Richard North dropped his glance on his plate as he answered, apparently intent on what was there. Miss Dallory's keen eyes had been on his: and she used to read a great deal that lay within them.

"There has been no discovery at all."

"It was thought to be Mr. Tim Wilks, I believe."

"It was certainly not he," said Richard, rather hastily.

"No! He had at least something to do with the mischief, if he did not write the letter."

"Yes. But without intending evil. The next to leave the home here may be myself," he added.

"*You!*"

"Of course you have heard that our works are at a standstill? The men have struck."

"That's old news: I heard it in Switzerland."

"If we are not able to re-open them—and I begin to think we shall not be—I must go out in the world and seek employment elsewhere."

"Nonsense, Richard North!"

"If you reflect for a moment, you will see that it is all sober earnest, Miss Dallory. When a man does not possess the means of living, he must work to earn one."

She said no more then. And when she spoke again the subject was changed.

"Is Bessy's marriage a happy one?"

"Very—as it seems to me. The worst is, Rane gets on as badly as ever in his profession."

"But why does he?"

"I know not. Except that Madam undoubtedly works—always works—to keep him back."

"What a shame! He shall come and attend me. I'll get up some headaches on purpose."

Richard laughed.

"We have had changes also, since you and I met," resumed Miss Dallory. "But not sad ones. I have become my own mistress in the world; am independent of everybody. And Frank has taken up his abode at Ham Court for a permanency."

"I hope you intend to make a good use of your independence," said Richard with gravity.

"Don't I. And I shall *be* independent; you may rely on that."

"We heard it rumoured sometime ago that you were likely to lose your independence, Miss Dallory."

"I! In what way?"

"By getting married."

Their eyes met for a moment, and then dropped. Miss Dallory laughed lightly.

"Did the news penetrate as far as this? Well, it never was 'likely,' Mr. Richard North. A—gentleman asked me; but I caught up an idea that he wanted my money more than he did myself, and so—nothing came of it."

"Who was he?"

"It would not be fair to him to tell."

"Right. Thank you for correcting me," spoke Richard in his earnest way. "I ought to feel shame for asking. I beg your pardon; and his."

Happening to glance at the young lady, he saw that her face had turned crimson with blushes. A rare thing for Miss Dallory. She was too self-possessed to display emotion on light occasions.

"Have you seen Ham Court lately?" she resumed, looking up; and the blushes made her look very pretty.

"Not since your brother came to it. He has not been here long, you know. I called one day, but they said Mr. Dallory was out?"

"The place is so nice now. He has made alterations and done it up beautifully. You must come again."

"With pleasure," answered Richard. "How long shall you remain with him?"

"As long as he will have me. I am not going away yet. I shall make it my home. Frank has quiet tastes and so have I: and we intend to live together like a brother-and-sister Darby and Joan, and grow into an old maid and an old bachelor."

Richard smiled. "How is it Francis did not come with you to dinner?"

"He was not in the way to get an invitation. May I dare to tell you why?" she added below her breath. "When we saw Madam's carriage driving up, Frank disappeared. 'Say I am out, Polly,' was his order to me. He and Madam never got on well: as a little boy he was terribly afraid of her, and I think the feeling lasts. When I went to put my bonnet on, I found him shut up in his room with the blinds down. He wished me joy of my visit, and promised to come and walk home with me in the evening."

"Take care of Madam's ears," breathed Richard.

"She cannot hear me. Your neighbour even cannot. Arthur may,"—looking round at Captain Bohun questioningly—"but I don't mind him."

“Talk away,” said Arthur. “Dick and I often wish we had a remote room, with locked door and drawn blinds, to use as a refuge in home storms. Heaven knows it is the pain of my life to be able to say this.”

How suggestive it was !—of the estimation in which Mrs. North was publicly held. For her son to confess this, for Miss Dallory with her refined mind and feeling to have called it forth, spoke badly for Madam.

She — Madam — rose from table early. Something in the arrangements seemed not to suit her. It was a warm and lovely evening, and they went out on the lawn. Miss Dallory slipped round the corner of the house to the window of Mr. North’s parlour.

It stood open and he sat just within it. Sat with his hands on his knees, and his head drooping. Miss Dallory started back : not so much because his face was thin and worn, but at its expression of hopeless despair. In her two years’ absence, he seemed to have aged ten.

She stepped over the threshold, and gently laid her hands on his. He looked up like a man bewildered.

“Why—it—it—it cannot be Mary Dallory.”



"It is Mary Dallory ; come home at last. You'll kiss me, won't you, dear Mr. North."

He kissed her very fondly. In the old days when John North was supposed to be the most rising man, in a commercial point of view, in the county, Mr. Dallory had thought it worth while to court his friendship, and Mr. North had been asked to stand to his little girl. Mary—after she lost her own parents—was wont to say she belonged to the Hall, and she used to be often there. Her aunt, Mrs. Leasom, who had been a Miss Dallory once, was left personal guardian to the children, with Ham Court as her residence until the younger son should be of age, to whom it would then lapse. But Mrs. Leasom spent a large portion of her time in London, and sometimes the children had not seen their native place, Dallory, for years together.

"When did you come home, my dear?"

"To England a week ago. To Ham Court only yesterday. Do you know that you are much changed?"

"Ay. There's nothing but change in this life, my dear. The nearer we approach the end of our days, the faster our sorrows seem

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to come upon us : I have had more than my share of them ; and they have changed me. Turning round, to this quarter, to that quarter, I see only one source of comfort left to me in the wide world."

"And that?" she asked, half kneeling at his feet.

"My dear son Richard. Nobody knows the good son he has been to me ; the sacrifices he has made. Nobody, save God."

Miss Dallory gave no answer to this. He was stroking her soft hair in deep abstraction, thinking no doubt of his many troubles—for he always was thinking of them—when the person in question entered ; Richard North. Miss Dallory rose and sat down on a chair decorously.

She remained but a minute or two now, and spent the time talking and laughing. Richard gave her his arm to take her back to the company. Miss Dallory apparently was in no hurry to go, for she lingered over some of the near flower-beds.

"Is the strike a serious matter?" she questioned, her voice taking a confidential tone.

"As serious as it is possible for any matter of the kind to be," replied Richard.

"You and your men were always on the best of terms : why did they become dissatisfied with you ?"

"They never became dissatisfied with me. The Trades Unions' agents stepped in and persuaded them they would be better off if they could work less time and be paid more wages. The men listened : it was only natural : and presented themselves to me with these new demands. I did not grant them, and they struck. That's the whole truth in a nutshell, Miss Dallory."

"I suppose you would not grant them ?"

"Right. I would not grant them upon principle ; I could not because my profits did not afford it. I am quite certain of one thing : that if I had acceded, in a short while the men would have demanded more. The Trades' Unions will never allow them to be satisfied, until——"

"Until what ?" she asked, for Richard had stopped.

"Until the country is ruined. Until its trade has left it."

"It is a serious thing," she said—and she was very grave now. "I suppose you would take the men on again at the old terms ?"

"And be glad to do it."

"And they will not be taken?"

"No. I have offered, in regard to their demand for increased wages, to meet them half-way. It is of no use."

"Then I think those men deserve to learn what want of employment means," she returned warmly. "I thought your men were intelligent; I used to know many of them. When I go amongst them—and that may be to-morrow—I shall ask if they have taken leave of their senses. What does Mrs. Gass say to it all?"

Richard smiled a little. Mrs. Gass said more than he did, he answered, but it was equally useless.

"And I suppose it is the strike that is troubling Mr. North? I do think him so changed."

"It troubles him of course—and there are other things."

"Does it trouble *you*?" asked Miss Dalory, in a pointed tone, as she looked straight at him.

"Trouble me!" he rejoined, in surprise at the superfluous question. "Why, see you not what it involves—unless we can go on

again? Simply ruin. Ruin for me, and for my father with me. There's your brother."

They had reached the lawn at length, and saw Francis Dallory, who had come to walk home with his sister. He was a short, fair young man with an open countenance. Madam had already seized upon him.

"Where's Arthur?" demanded Madam imperiously, as Miss Dallory came into view on Richard's arm. "I thought he was with you."

Miss Dallory answered that she had not seen Arthur Bohun since she quitted the dinner-table. Nobody had seen him—that Madam could discover. She suspected he must have gone off somewhere to smoke; and would have liked to put his pipe behind the fire.

But the pipe was not in fault. Arthur Bohun, possibly thinking there were enough without him, had surreptitiously made his escape, and gone for a stroll towards the Ham. It took him so near to Mrs. Cumberland's that he said to himself he might as well call in and ask after her headache—that she had been suffering from in the morning.

Sophistry! Nothing but sophistry. Cap-

tain Arthur Bohun did not really care whether the headache was worse or better ; until a minute ago he had not even remembered that she had complained of one. The naked truth was, that he could not bear to rest for even one evening without a sight of Ellen Adair. No mother ever hungered for a lost child, as he hungered for her presence.

They were at tea. Mrs. Cumberland, Ellen, and Mr. Seeley. When Jelly showed Captain Bohun in, the doctor was just taking his second cup. Ellen, who sat at the tea-tray, asked Captain Bohun if he would like some, and he rather savagely answered No. Warfare lay in his mind. What business had that man to be sitting there on a footing of companionship with Ellen Adair ?

Mrs. Cumberland's head was a little worse, if anything, she replied, thanking Captain Bohun for his solicitude in regard to it. Mr. Seeley had given her two draughts of something—ether, she believed—in the afternoon, but they had not done the head any good. Arthur pushed back his golden hair in a passion. Then the man had had the impudence to go there in the afternoon as well as morning and evening ! *How* could Mrs. Cumber-

land so far forget the fitness of propriety as to allow him to take tea with her—to invite him, no doubt—when she knew that by so doing he must also take it with Ellen Adair?

It might have come to a question of which would have sat out the other—for Mr. Seeley detected somewhat of the feelings of Arthur Bohun's mind, and resented them, considering himself as good a man as he, in regard of possessing the same right to a chance of woman's favour—but for the entrance of Dr. Rane. Dr. Rane appeared to have no present intention of leaving again, for he plunged into a hot discussion with his brother practitioner touching some difficult question in surgery, which seemed quite likely to continue all night, and Arthur Bohun rose. He would have remained on willingly, but he was ever sensitive as to intruding, and he fancied Mrs. Cumberland might wonder why he stayed.

As he went out, Francis Dallory and his sister were passing on their walk homeward. Captain Bohun turned with them, and went to the end of the Ham.

The shades of evening—nay, of night—had stolen over the earth as he went back; the light night of summer. The north-west was

bright with its blue-green tinge of opal ; a star or two twinkled in the heavens. Dr. Rane was pacing his garden walks, his wife on his arm.

“ Good-night, Bessy ! ” he called out, to her whom he had always regarded as his step-sister.

“ Good-night, Arthur ! ” came the hearty rejoinder—for Bessy had recognised his voice.

Onwards for a few steps—only a few—and it brought Arthur Bohun level with the window of Mrs. Cumberland’s drawing-room. It was not yet lighted. At the window, their heads nearly close together, stood the other doctor and Ellen Adair. In Captain Bohun’s desperate anger, he stared Ellen full in the face, and made no movement of recognition. Turning his head away with a contemptuous movement, quite plainly discernible in the dusk, he went striding on.

Shakespeare never read more truly the human heart than when he said that jealousy makes the food it feeds on. Arthur Bohun went home nearly mad ; not so much with jealousy in its narrow sense, as with indignation at the doctor’s most iniquitous presumption. Could he have analysed his own heart



in due fairness, he would have found full trust in the good faith of Ellen Adair. But he was swayed by man's erring nature, and yielded to it wilfully.

How innocent it all was ! how little suggestive of fear, could Captain Bohun but have read events correctly. There had been no invitation to tea at all ; Mr. Seeley had gone in just as they began to take it, and was offered a cup by Mrs. Cumberland. As to the being together at the window, Ellen had been standing there to catch the fading light for her wool work, perhaps as an excuse for leaving him and Mrs. Cumberland to converse alone ; and he had just come up to her to say good-night as Captain Bohun passed.

If we did but divine the real truth of these fancies when jealousy puts them before us in its false and glaring light, some phases of our lives might be all the happier. Arthur Bohun lay tossing the whole night long on his sleepless pillow, tormenting himself by wondering what Ellen Adair's answer to Seeley would be. That the fellow in his audacity was proposing to her as they stood at the window, he could have sworn before the Lord Chief Baron of England. It was a wretched night ;

his tumultuous thoughts were fit to kill him. Arthur had Collins's "Ode to the Passions" by heart; but it never occurred to him to recal any part of it to profit now.

"Thy numbers, Jealousy, to nought were fixed,  
Sad proof of thy distressful state.  
Of differing themes the veering song was mixed :  
And now it courted Love ; now, raving, called on  
Hate."

## CHAPTER V.

### LOVE AMONG THE ROSES.

THE early sunshine is a great purifier. Fancies find but little room in the matter-of-fact bustle of every-day life. When Arthur Bohun rose, his senses had returned to him. That Ellen Adair's love was his, and that no fear existed of her accepting any other man, let him be prince or peasant, reason told him. He wanted to see her; for *that* his heart was always yearning; but on this morning when, as it seemed, he had been judging her harshly, the necessity seemed overwhelmingly great. His impatient feet would have carried him to Mrs. Cumberland's after breakfast; but his spirit was a little rebellious yet, and kept him back. He'd not show his impatience, he thought; he'd not go down until the afternoon; and he began to resort to all kinds of expedients to kill the

earlier time. He walked with Richard North the best part of the way to Dallory : he came back and wrote to his aunt, Miss Bohun ; he went pottering about the flower-beds with Mr. North. As the day wore on towards noon, his restless feet betook him to Ham Lane—which the reader has not visited since he saw Dr. Rane hastening through it on the dark and troubled night that opened this history. The hedges were green now, blooming with their dog-roses of delicate pink and white, redolent with the perfume of sweet-briar. Captain Bohun went along, switching at these same pleasant hedges with his cane. Avoiding the turning that would take him out into Dallory Ham, he continued his way to another lane, less luxurious ; the lane that ran along the back of the houses of the Ham, and which was familiarly called by their inhabitants “the back lane.” Strolling onwards, he had the satisfaction of finding himself passing by the dead wall of Mrs Cumberland’s garden, and of seeing the roof and chimneys of her house. Should he go round and call ? A few steps lower down, just beyond Dr. Rane’s, there was an opening that would take him, a public-house at

its corner. He had told himself he would not go until the afternoon, and now it was barely twelve o'clock; should he call, or should he not?

Moving on, in his indecision, at a slow pace, he had got just opposite Dr. Rane's back garden door, when it suddenly opened, and the doctor came forth.

"Ah, how d'ye do?" said the doctor, rather surprised at seeing Arthur Bohun there. "Were you coming in this way? The door was bolted."

"Only taking a stroll," carelessly replied Captain Bohun. "How's Bessy?"

"Quite well. She is in the dining-room, if you'll come in and see her."

Nothing loth, Arthur Bohun stepped in at once, the doctor continuing on his way. Mrs. Rane was darning stockings. She and Arthur had always been the very best of friends, quite brother and sister. Meek and gentle as ever, she looked, sitting there with her smooth, curling hair, and the loving expression in her mild, soft eyes. Arthur sat down and talked with her, his glance roving ever to that other house, seeking the form of one whom he did not see.

"Do you know how Mrs. Cumberland is this morning?" he inquired of Bessy.

"I have not heard. Mr. Seeley has been there; for I saw him in the dining-room with Ellen Adair."

Arthur Bohun's pulses froze to ice. Figuratively speaking, his golden hair bristled up, stiff and straight.

"I think they are both in the garden now."

"Are they?" snapped Arthur. "His patients must get on nicely if he idles away his mornings in a garden."

Bessy looked up from her darning. "I don't mean that Seeley's there, Arthur—I mean Mrs. Cumberland and Ellen."

As Bessy spoke, Jelly was seen to come out of Mrs. Cumberland's house, penetrate amidst the trees, and return with her mistress.

"Some one has called, I suppose," remarked Bessy.

Captain Bohun thought the gods had made the opportunity for himself expressly. He went out, stepped over the small wire fence, and disappeared in the direction that Mrs. Cumberland had come from, believing it would lead him to Ellen Adair.

In the secluded and beautiful spot where

we first saw her (but where we shall not often, alas ! see her again) she sat. The flowers of early spring were out then ; the richer summer flowers were blooming now. A natural bower of roses seemed to encompass her about ; the shrubs clustered, the trees o'ershadowed her overhead. The falling cascade was trickling softly as ever down the artificial rocks, murmuring its monotonous cadence ; the birds sang to it and to each other from branch to branch ; glimpses of the green lawn and of brilliantly-hued flowers were caught through the trees. Ellen Adair had sometimes thought the spot beautiful as a scene of fairy-land. It was little less so.

She was not working this morning. An open book lay before her on the rustic table ; her cheek was leaning on her raised hand, from which the wrist-lace fell back, a hand so suspiciously delicate as to betoken some lack of sound strength in its owner. She wore a white dress, with a bow of pink ribbon at the throat, and a pink waist-band. There were times, and this was one, when she looked extremely fragile.

A sound as of footsteps. Ellen only thought it was Mrs. Cumberland returning, and read

on. But there was a different sound in *these* steps as they gained on her ear. Her heart stood still, and then bounded on again with a tumultuous rush, her pulses tingled, her sweet face turned red as the blushing rose. Sunshine had come.

“ Good morning, Miss Adair.”

In a cold, resentful, haughty tone was it spoken, and he did not attempt to shake hands. The sunshine seemed to go in again with a sweep. She shut her book and opened it, shut and opened it, her fingers fluttering. Captain Bohun put his hat on the seat.

“ I thought Seeley might be here,” said he, seeking out a pretty rose, and plucking it carefully.

“ Seeley !” she exclaimed.

“ Seeley. I beg your pardon. I did not know I spoke indistinctly. SEELEY.”

He stood and faced her, watching the varying colour of her face, the soft blushes going and coming. Sometimes they increased his anger.

“ May I ask if you have accepted him ?”

“ Ac—cepted him !” she stammered, in wild confusion. “ Accepted what ?”

“ The offer that Seeley made you last night.”



"It was not last night," she replied in a confused impulse.

"Oh, then it was this morning! May I congratulate you, or not?"

Ellen Adair turned to her book in deep vexation. She had been caught, as it were—de-luded into the tacit admission that Mr. Seeley had made the offer. And she was hurt at Arthur Bohun's words and tone. Had he no better trust in her than *this*? As she turned the leaves of the book backwards and forwards in her agitation, as if seeking for some particular page, the plain gold ring on her finger attracted his sight. He was chafing inwardly, but he strove to appear at the most careless ease, and sat down as far from her as the bench allowed, which, seeing that it would only hold two stout people, could not be very far.

"I'd be honourable if I died for it," he remarked with indifference, sniffing at the rose. "Is it quite the thing for you to listen to another man while you wear that ring upon your finger?"

Ellen took it off and pushed it towards him along the table.

This frightened him. He turned as white as ashes. Until this, he had only been speak-

ing in jealousy, not in belief. Her own face was becoming white, her lips were compressed to hide their trembling. And thus they sat for a minute or two, like the two simpletons they were. He looked at the ring, he looked at her.

"Do you mean it, Ellen?" he asked, in a voice that struggled with agitation, proving how very earnest he deemed the thing was becoming—whatever it might have begun in.

She made no answer.

"Do you wish to give me back this ring?"

"What you said was, I thought, equivalent to asking for it."

"It was not. You know better."

"Why are you quarrelling with me?"

Moving an inch nearer, he changed his tone to gentleness, bending his head forward to speak.

"Heaven knows that it is bitter enough to do so. Have I cause, Ellen?"

Her eyes were bent down; the colour stole into her face again; a half smile parted her lips.

"You know, Ellen, it is a perfectly monstrous thing that a common man like Seeley

should dare to cast his aspiring thoughts to you."

"Was it my fault?" she returned. "He ought to have seen that—that—I should not like it."

"What did you tell him?"

"That it was quite impossible; that he was making a mistake altogether. When he was gone, I complained to Mrs. Cumberland."

"Insolent jackanapes! Was he rude, Ellen?"

"Rude! Mr. Seeley!" she returned in surprise. "Quite the contrary. He has always been as considerate and respectful as a man can be. You look down on his position, Arthur, but he is as complete a gentleman in mind as you are."

"I only despise his position when he would seek to unite you to it."

"It has been very wrong of you to make me confess this. I can tell you *I* am feeling anything but 'honourable,' as you put it just now. There are things that should never be talked about; this is one. Nothing can be more unfair."

Very unfair. Captain Bohun's high-class feeling had come back to him, and he could

but assent to it. He began to feel a little ashamed of himself on more points than one.

"It shall never escape my lips, Ellen, while I breathe. Seeley's secret is safe for me."

Taking up the ring, he held it for a moment, as if examining the gold. Ellen rose and went outside. The interview was becoming a very conscious one. He caught her up near the cascade, took her right hand in his, and slipped the ring upon her third finger.

"How many times has it been off?" he asked.

"Never until to-day."

"Well, there it is again, Ellen. Cherish it still. I hope—I hope—that ere long——"

He did not finish, but she understood quite well what he meant. Their eyes met, and each read the impassioned love seated within the other; strangely pure withal, and idealistic as ever poet dreamed of. He strained the hand in his.

"Forgive my petulance, my darling."

Save for the one sweet word and the lingering pressure of the hand; save that the variegated rose was transferred from his possession to hers, the interview had been wholly uncharacterised by the fond signs and tokens

that are commonly supposed to attend the intercourse of lovers. Captain Bohun had hitherto abstained from using such, and perhaps heaven alone knew what the self-denial cost. In his ultra-refined nature he may have deemed such would be unjustifiable, until he could speak out openly and say, Will you be my wife ?

"What is your book, Ellen ?" he asked, as she returned to take it from the table.

"Longfellow."

"Longfellow ! Shall I read it to you ? can you stay out ?"

"I can stay until one o'clock : luncheon time."

They sat down and he began : "The Courtship of Miles Standish." The blue sky shone down upon them through the flickering leaves, the cascade trickled, the bees hummed in the warm air, the white butterflies sported with the buds and flowers : and Ellen Adair, her hands clasping that treasure they held, the variegated rose, her eyes falling on it to hide their happiness, listened in wrapt attention, for the voice was sweeter to her than any heard out of heaven.

The words of that other poet—not Long-

fellow, as we all know—most surely were applicable to this period of the existence of Captain Bohun and Ellen Adair. One of them at least would acknowledge it amidst the bitterness of after life.

“Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands,  
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.”

It could not last—speaking now only of the hour. One o'clock came all too soon; when he had seemingly read but ten minutes; and Miles Standish had to be left in the most unsatisfactory state. Ellen rose: she must hasten in.

“It is a pity to leave it at this,” said Arthur. “Shall I come and finish it in the afternoon?”

Ellen shook her head. In the afternoon she would have to drive out with Mrs. Cumberland.

Captain Bohun went home through the green lanes, and soon found himself amidst those other flowers—Mr. North's. That gentleman came forth from his parlour to meet him, apparently in some tribulation, a letter in his hand.

"Oh, Arthur, I don't know what to say to you; I am so sorry," he exclaimed. "Look here. When the postman came this morning, I happened to be out on the lawn, and he gave me my two letters, as I thought, and as he must have thought, going on to the hall door with the rest. I put them in my pocket, and forgot them, Arthur: my spectacles were indoors. When I remembered them only just now, I found one was directed to you in Sir Nash's hand. I am so sorry," repeated poor Mr. North in his most helpless manner.

"Don't be that, sir," replied Arthur cheerily. "It's nothing; not of the least consequence at all," he added, opening the letter. But nevertheless, as his eyes fell on the contents, a rather startled expression took his face.

"There!" cried Mr. North, looking inclined to cry. "Something's wrong, and the delay has done mischief."

"Indeed nothing's wrong—in the sense you are thinking," repeated Arthur—for he would not have added to the poor old man's troubles for the world. "My uncle says James is not so well as he could wish: he wants me to go

up at once and stay with them. You can read it for yourself, sir."

Mr. North put on his glasses. "I see, Arthur. You might have gone the first thing this morning, but for my keeping the letter. It was very stupid of the postman to give it me."

Arthur laughed. "Indeed I should have made no such hurry. There's not the least necessity for that. I think I shall go up this afternoon, though."

"Yes do, Arthur. And explain to Sir Nash that it was my fault. Tell him that I am growing forgetful and useless. Fit only to be cut down, Arthur; to be cut down."

Arthur Bohun put the old man's arm affectionately within his, and took him back to his parlour. If Mr. North had grown old it was with worry, not with years: the worry dealt out to him daily by Madam; and Arthur would have remedied it with his best blood, had he known how.

"You had better go up with me, sir; for a little change. Sir Nash would be so glad to see you."

"I go up with you! I couldn't, Arthur; I am not equal to it now. And the strike is



on, you know, and my place ought to be here while it lasts. The men look upon me still as their master, though Dick—Dick acts. And there's another thing, Arthur—I couldn't leave my roses just as they have come into bloom."

Arthur Bohun smiled: the last reason was all cogent. Mr. North stayed behind, and he went up that same afternoon to London.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE TONTINE.

THE tontine. If the reader only knew how important a share the tontine—with its results—holds in this little history, he would enter on it with interest.

Tontines may be of different arrangement. In fact, they are so. This one was as follows. It had been instituted at Whitborough. Ten gentlemen put each an equal sum into a common fund, and invested the whole in the joint names of ten children, all under a year old. This money was to be allowed to accumulate at compound interest, until only one of those children should be left alive: that one, the last survivor, would then receive the whole of the money unconditionally.

Of these ten children whose names were inscribed on the parchment deed, Oliver Rane and Bessy North alone survived. Mr. North

had been wont to call it an unlucky tontine, for its members had died off rapidly one after another. For several years only three had been left; and now one of them, George Massey, had followed in the wake of those that were gone. Under ordinary circumstances, the tontine would have excited no comment whatever, but have gone on smoothly to the end: that is, until one of the two survivors had collapsed. The other one would have had the money paid him; and nothing been thought about it, except that he was a fortunate man.

But this case was exceptional. The two survivors were man and wife. For the good fortune to lapse to one of them, the other must die. It was certainly a curious position, and it excited a good deal of comment in the neighbourhood. Dallory, as prone to gossip as other places, made it into that oft-quoted thing, a nine-days' wonder. In the general stagnation caused by the strike, people took up the tontine as a source of relief.

Practically the tontine was of no further use to the two remaining members; that is, to the two combined. They were one, so to say; and so long as they continued to

be such, the money could not lapse. If Bessy died, Dr. Rane would take it; if Dr. Rane died, she would take it. Nothing more could be made of it than this. It had been accumulating now just one-and-thirty years; how much longer it would be left to accumulate, none could foresee. For one-and-thirty years to come, in all human probability; for Dr. Rane and his wife appeared to possess, each, a sound and healthy constitution. Nay, they might survive ten or twenty years beyond that, and yet not be very aged. And so, there it was; and Dallory made the matter its own, with unceremonious freedom.

But not as Dr. and Mrs. Rane did. They had need of money, and this huge sum (huge to them) lying at the very threshold of their door, but forbidden to enter, was more tantalizing than pen can tell. Richard North had not been far wrong in his computation: and the amount, as it stood at present, was rather considerably over two thousand pounds. The round sum, however, was large enough to reckon by, without counting the odds and ends. Two thousand pounds; Two thousand pounds theirs of right, and yet they might not touch it because one of them was not dead!

How many hours they spent discussing the matter with each other could never be computed. As soon as the twilight of the evening came on, wherever they might be and whatever the occupation, the theme was sure to be drifted into. In the dining-room when it grew too dusk for Dr. Rane to pursue his writing ; in the drawing-room, into which Bessy would wile him, and sing to him one of her simple songs ; walking together, arm within arm, in the garden paths, the stars in the summer sky above them, the waving trees encompassing them round about, the subject of the tontine would be taken up : the tontine ; nothing but the tontine. It was no wonder that they grew to form plans of what they would do if the money were theirs : we all know how apt we are to let imagination run away with us, and to indulge visions that grow to seem like reality. Dr. Rane painted a bright future. With two thousand pounds in hand, he could establish himself in a first-class metropolitan locality, set up well, both professionally and socially ; and there would be plenty of money for him and his wife to live upon while the practice was growing. Bessy entered into it all as eagerly as he. Having become accustomed to

the idea of quitting Dallory, she never glanced back at the possibility of remaining. *She* thought his eager wish, his unalterable determination to leave it, was connected only with the interests of his profession; *he* knew that the dread of a certain possible discovery, ever haunting his conscience, made the place more intolerable to him day by day. At any cost he must get away from it; at any cost. There was a great happiness in these evening conversations, in the glowing hope presented by plans and projects. But, where was the use of indulging such, when the tontine money (the pivot on which all was to turn) could never be theirs? As often as this damping recollection brought them up with a check, Dr. Rane would fall into a gloomy silence. Gradually, by the very force of thinking, he saw a way, or thought he saw a way, by which their hopes might be accomplished. And that was, to induce the trustees to advance the money at once to him and his wife jointly.

Meanwhile the strike continued in unabated force. Not a man was at work; every one refused to do a stroke unless he could be paid for it what *he* thought right, and left off

his daily labour when he chose. One might have supposed, by the independence of the demands, that the men were the masters and North and Gass the servants. Privation was beginning to reign, garments grew scanty, faces pinched. There was not so much as a sixpence for superfluities : and under that head in troubled times must be classed the attendance of a medical man. It will readily be understood, therefore, that this state of affairs did not contribute to fill the pockets of Dr. Rane.

One day, Mr. North, sitting on the short green bench in front of his choicest carnation bed, found two loving hands put round his neck from behind. He had been three parts asleep, and woke up slightly bewildered.

“ Bessy, child, is it you ? ”

It was Mrs. Rane. Her footfall on the grass had not been heard. She wore a cool print dress and black silk mantle ; and her plain straw bonnet sat well on, around the pretty falling curls. Bessy looked quiet and simple always : and always a lady.

“ Did I startle you, papa ? ”

“ No, my dear. When I felt the arms, I thought it was Mary Dallory. She comes

upon me without warning sometimes. Here's room, Bessy."

Making way for her, she sat down beside him. It was a very hot morning, and Bessy untied the strings of her bonnet. There was a slight look of weariness on her face, as if she were just a little worried with home cares. In truth she felt so : but all for Oliver's sake. If the money came not in so freely as to make matters easy, she did not mind it for herself, but for him.

"Papa, I have come to talk to you," she began, laying one of her hands on his knee affectionately. "It is about the tontine money. Oliver thinks that it might be paid to us conjointly ; that it ought to be."

"I know he does," replied Mr. North. "It can't be done, Bessy."

Her countenance fell a little. "Do you think not, papa?"

"I am sure not, child."

"Papa, I am here this morning to beg of you to use your interest for us with Sir Thomas Ticknell. Oliver knows nothing of my coming. He said last night, when we were talking, that if you could be induced to throw your interest into our scale, the bank might listen to you.



So I thought to myself that I would come to you in the morning and ask."

"The bank won't listen to me, nor to anybody else, in this matter, Bessy. It's against the law to pay the tontine over while two of you are alive, and the Ticknells are too strict to risk it. I shouldn't do it myself in their places."

"What Oliver says is this, papa. The money must, in the due course of events, come to either him or me, whichever of us shall survive the other. We have therefore an equal interest in it, and possess at present an equal chance of succeeding to it. No one else in the wide world, but our two selves, has the smallest claim to it, or ever can have. We are the only survivors of the ten; the rest are all dead. Why, then, should the trustees not stretch a point, and let us have the money while it can be of use to us conjointly? Oliver says they ought to do it."

"I know he does," remarked Mr. North.

"Has Oliver spoken to you, papa?"

"No," said Mr. North. "I heard about it from Dick. Dick happened to be at the bank yesterday, and Thomas Ticknell mentioned to him that Dr. Rane had been urging this re-

quest upon them. Dick said Sir Thomas seemed quite horrified at the proposition; they had told Dr. Rane, in answer, that if they could consent to such a thing it would be no better than a fraud."

"So they did," replied Bessy. "When Oliver was relating it to me after he came home, he could not help laughing—in spite of his vexation. The money is virtually ours, so where would the fraud lie?"

"To be virtually yours is one thing, Bessy; to be legally yours is another. You young women can't be expected to understand business questions, my dear; but your husband understands them. Of course it would be a great boon to get the two thousand pounds while you are both together; but it would not be a legal thing for the bankers to do, and they are right in refusing it."

"Then—do you think there is no chance for us, papa?"

"Not a bit of it, child."

A silence ensued. Mr. North sat watching his carnations, Bessy watching, with a far-off gaze, the dark-blue summer sky, as if the difficulty might be solved there. In spite of her father's opinion, she thought

the brothers, Thomas and William Ticknell, unduly hard.

The Ticknells were the chief bankers of Whitborough. Upon the institution of the tontines, the two brothers, then in their early prime, had been made trustees to it, in conjunction with a gentleman named Wilson. In the course of time, Mr. Wilson died : and Mr. Thomas and Mr. William Ticknell grew into tolerably aged men ; they wanted now not much of the allotted span, three score years and ten. The elder brother had gone up to court with some great local matter, and he came back Sir Thomas. These two gentlemen had full power over the funds of the tontine. They were straightforward, honourable men ; of dispositions naturally cautious ; and holding very strict opinions in business. Increasing years had not tended to lessen the caution, or to soften the strict tenets : and when Dr. Rane, soliciting a private interview with the brothers, presented himself before them with a proposition that they should pay over the tontine funds to him and his wife conjointly, without waiting for the death of either, the few hairs remaining on the old gentlemen's white heads, rose up on end.

Truly it had seemed to them, this singular application, as touching closely upon fraud. Dr. Rane argued the matter with them, putting it in the most feasible and favourable light: and it must be acknowledged that, to his mind, it appeared a thing not only that they might do, but that it would be in them perfectly right and honest to do. All in vain; they heard him with courtesy, but were harder than adamant. Richard North happened to go in upon some business soon after the conclusion of the interview, and the brothers—they were the bankers to North and Gass—told him confidentially of the application. Richard imparted it to his father: hence Mr. North heard Bessy without surprise.

Regarded in the narrow, legal view, of course the Messrs. Ticknell might be right; but, taking it broadly and comprehensively, there could be no doubt that it seemed hard upon Oliver Rane and his wife. The chief question that had presented itself to Richard North's mind was, if the money were handed over now, would the Messrs. Ticknell be quite secure from ulterior consequences? They said *not*. Upon Richard North's suggesting that a lawyer might be consulted on the point, Sir

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Thomas Ticknell answered that, no matter what a lawyer might say, they should never incur the responsibility of parting with the tontine money so long as two of its members were living. "And I think they must be right," Richard remarked afterwards to his father. Turning to Bessy, sitting by him on the bench, Mr. North repeated this. Bessy listened in dutiful silence, but shook her head.

"Papa, much as I respect Richard's judgment, clever as I know him to be, I am sure he is wrong here. It is very strange that he should go against me and Oliver."

"It is because of his good judgment, my dear," replied Mr. North simply. "I'd trust it against the world, on account of his impartiality. When he has to decide between two opposite opinions, he invariably puts himself, or tries to put himself, in either place, weighs each side, and comes to a conclusion unbiassed. Look at this strike, now on: Dick has been reproached with leaning to the men's side, with holding familiar argument with them, for and against; a thing that few masters would do: but it is because he sees they really believe they have right on their side, and he would treat their opinions with respect,

however mistaken he may know them to be."

"Richard cannot think the men are not to blame!" exclaimed Mrs. Rane.

"He lays the blame chiefly where, as *he* says, it is due—on the Trade Union. The men were deluded into listening to it at first; and they can't help obeying its dictates now: they have given themselves over to it, body and soul, Bessy, and can no more escape than a prisoner from a dungeon. That's Richard's view, mind; and it makes him all leniency: I'd try and bring 'em to their senses in a different way, if I had the power and the means left me."

"In what way, papa?"

"Bessy, if I were what I once was—a wealthy man, independent of business—I'd close the works for good: break 'em up: burn 'em if need be: anything but re-open them. The trade should go where it would, and the men after it; or stop here and starve, just as they chose. It's not I that would have my peace of life worried out of me by these strikes; or let men, that I have employed and done liberally by always, dictate to me. You've heard of the old saying—cutting off

the nose to spite the face : that's just what the men will find they have done. They'll find it, Bessy, to their cost, as sure as that we two are sitting here."

Mr. North laid hold of the hoe that was resting on the elbow of the bench, and struck it lightly on the ground. Meaning no doubt to give emphasis to his words. Bessy Rane passed from the subject of the strike to that which more immediately concerned her.

"Richard is honest, papa ; he would never say what he did not think ; but he may be mistaken sometimes. I *cannot* understand how he can think the Ticknells right in refusing to let us have the money. If there were the slightest, smallest, reason for their keeping it back, it would be different : but there's none."

"Look here, Bessy. If they go by the strict letter of the law, they cannot do it. The tontine deed was drawn up as tightly as any deed can be : it expressly says that nine of the members must be dead, and only the tenth remaining, before the money can be withdrawn from where it is invested. The Ticknells can't get over this."

"Papa—forgive me—you should not say

can't, but won't," spoke Mrs. Rane. "They can do it if they please; there's nothing to prevent it. All power, to act, lies with them; they are responsible to none: if they paid over the money to Oliver to-morrow, not an individual in the whole world, from the Queen upon her throne to the youngest clerk in their counting-house, could call them to account for it. The strictest judge on the bench might not say to them afterwards, You have paid away money that you had no right to pay."

"Stop a bit, Bessy—that's just where the weak point lies. The Ticknells say that if they parted with the money now, they might be called upon for it again at some future time."

Bessy sat in amazement. "Why! How could that be?"

Mr. North raised his straw hat and rubbed his head before he replied. It was a somewhat puzzling question.

"Dick put it somehow in this way, my dear: that is, Thomas Ticknell put it to him. If you should die, Bessy, leaving your husband a widower with children (or, for the matter of that, if he should die, leaving you with some)



the children might come upon the Ticknells for the money over again. Or Rane might come upon them, if he were the one left; or you, if you were. It was in that way, I think Dick said, but my memory is not as clear as it used to be."

"As if we should be so dishonourable! Besides—there could be no possibility of claiming the money twice. Having received it once, the Ticknells would hold our receipt for it."

Mr. North shook his head. "The law is full of quips and turns, Bessy. If the trustees paid over this money to you and your husband now, against the provisions of the tontine deed, I suppose it is at least a nice question whether the survivor of you could not compel them to pay it again."

Bessy held her breath. "Do *you* think they could be compelled, papa?"

"Well, I don't know, Bessy. I fancy perhaps they might be. Dick says they are right, as prudent men, to refuse. One thing you and Oliver may rest assured of, my dear—that, under the doubt, the Ticknells will never be got to do it as long as oak and ash grow."

Bessy Rane sighed, and began to tie her bonnet. She had no idea that the paying of the money would involve the trustees in any liability, real or fancied, and hope went out of her from this moment. By nature she was as just as Richard ; and she could not henceforth even wish that the bankers should incur the risk.

"Dick's indoors, my dear, if you'd like to ask him what Thomas Ticknell said ; he would explain it to you better than I have. No haste now, to go off in a morning : there's no works open to go to."

"I have heard enough, papa ; I quite understand it now," was Mrs. Rane's answer. "It will be a dreadful disappointment to Oliver when he hears that no chance, or hope, is left. It would have been—oh such a help to us."

"He is not getting on very well, is he, Bessy ?"

"No. Especially since the strike set in. The men can't pay."

"Seeley must feel it as well as Oliver."

"Not half as much ; not a quarter. His practice chiefly lies amid the richer classes. Well, we must have patience. As Oliver

says, Fortune does not seem to smile upon us just now."

"If I could put a hundred-pound note, or so, into your hand, while these bad times are being tided over, I'd do it, Bessy, with all my heart. But I can't. Tell Oliver so. The strike is bringing us no end of embarrassment, and I don't know where it will end. It was bad enough before, as you remember, Bessy; but we had always Richard as a refuge."

"Richard will take care of you still, papa; don't be troubled; in some way or other, I am sure he will. As to ourselves, we are young, and can wait for the good time coming."

Very cheerily she spoke. And perhaps felt so. Bessy's gentle nature held a great deal of sunshine.

"I wonder Oliver's mother does not help him," remarked Mr. North.

"Her will would be good to do it, papa, but she lives up to every farthing of her income: beyond it, I fancy, sometimes. She has luxuries around her, and her travelling about costs a good deal. Mrs. Cumberland is not one to cut and contrive, or to put up with small lodgings on her different sojourns. Sometimes, as you know, she travels post: it

is easier, she says ; and that is very expensive."

"You'll come indoors a bit, won't you, Bessy?" said Mr. North as she rose. "Miss Field and Matilda were sitting in the hall just now, for coolness."

She hesitated for a moment, and then walked on by his side. Mrs. Rane's visits to the Hall were rare. Madam had not been cordial with her since her marriage ; and she had never once condescended to enter Bessy's home.

The hall was empty. Bessy was about to enter the drawing-room in search of Matilda, when the door opened to give Madam egress. The two touched each other. Madam stared haughtily, stepped back, and shut the door in Bessy's face. Next moment, a hand was extended over Bessy's shoulder, and threw it wide.

"By your leave, Madam," said Richard North calmly. "Room for my sister."

He marshalled her in as though she had been a duchess. Madam, drawing her lace shawl around her shoulders, swept majestically out, vouchsafing neither word nor look. It was nothing more than the contempt often

dealt to Bessy : but Richard's blood went up in a boil.

That the refusal of the trustees to part with the funds of the tontine was irrevocable, there could be no doubt : nevertheless, Oliver Rane declined to see it. The matter got wind, as nearly everything else seemed to do in Dal-lory, and many of the public took his part. It was a frightful shame, they thought, that a man and his wife could not be let enjoy together the money that was their due, but must wait for one or the other's death before they got it. Jelly's tongue made itself particularly busy. Dr. Rane was not a favourite of hers on the whole, but she espoused his cause warmly in this.

"It's such a temptation," remarked Jelly to a select few, one night at Ketler's, whither she had betaken herself to blow up the man for continuing to hold out on strike, to which movement Jelly was a determined foe.

"A temptation?" rejoined Tim Wilks respectfully, who made one of her audience. "In what way, Miss Jelly?"

"In what way," retorted Jelly with some scorn. "Why in the way of *stealing* the money, if it is to be got at ; or of punching

those two old bankers' heads. When a man's kept out of his own through nothing but some nagging crochet, it's enough to make him feel desperate, Tim Wilks."

"So it is, miss," acquiesced meek Timothy.

"If my mistress withheld my wages from me—which it's twenty pounds a year, and her left-off silks—I should fight at it, I know: perhaps take 'em. And *this* is two thousand pounds."

"Two thousand pounds!" ejaculated honest Ketler in a low tone of reverence, as he lifted his hands. "And for the doctor to be kept out of it because his wife's not dead! It is a shame."

"I'd not say, either, but it might bring another sort of temptation to some men, besides those mentioned by Miss Jelly," put in Timothy Wilks with hesitation.

"And pray what would that be?" demanded Jelly in a tart voice—for she made it a point to keep Timothy under before company.

"The putting of his wife out of the way on purpose to get the money, Miss Jelly," spoke Tim with deprecation. And the words caused a sudden pause.

"You—you don't mean the murdering of

her!" shrieked Mrs. Ketler, who was a timid woman and apt to be startled.

"Yes I did," replied Timothy Wilks. "Some might be found to do it. No offence to Dr. Rane. I'm putting the supposititious case of a bad man; not of him."

## CHAPTER VII.

### AT THE SEA-SIDE.

THE summer was slowly passing. At a small and obscure sea-side place on the East coast, was located Mrs. Cumberland. She had engaged part of one of the few good houses there—houses that let at an enormous price in the season to visitors—and lived in it with Ellen Adair, and her maid to wait on her. Not Jelly this time, but the housemaid, Ann. Mrs. Cumberland's own house at Dallory was being painted inside during her absence. She had deemed it well to leave Jelly in charge ; and so brought Ann instead.

They had been at this place, Eastsea, for some weeks now ; and Ellen privately believed that the sojourn was never coming to an end. Any thing more wearisome than it was to her, could not have been found. Arthur Bohun was in London at his uncle's, where he had



been staying for some time. It was several weeks since he and Ellen had met ; to her it seemed as many months. James Bohun was still ill, but fluctuated much ; at one time appearing to be past recovery, at another as if he were all but well. He would not part with Arthur ; Sir Nash said he must not think of leaving. Under the circumstances, Arthur did not see his way clear to get away.

Another person was fluctuating. And that was Mrs. Cumberland. Her complaint, connected with the heart, was just one of those that may snap life suddenly, or allow it to be prolonged for years. That she was gradually growing worse, there could not be a doubt of ; but it was by almost imperceptible degrees. No change could be noted from day to day : it was only by comparing her present state with what it had been three, or six, or twelve months before, that the decay could be seen. Sometimes, for days together, she would feel very ill, be quite unable to quit her room ; and again she would have an interval of ease, almost of seeming recovery, and walk and drive out daily. Dr. Rane had come over twice to see his mother ; staying but a few hours. His opinion was, that she might yet,

with care, live for years ; and probably many. At the same time, he knew that there could be, speaking only in a medical point of view, no certainty of it.

It was during this sojourn at Eastsea, that Mrs. Cumberland received news from Mr. Adair. He wrote in answer to Mrs. Cumberland's letter—the first of the two letters already told of—wherein she had spoken of the probability of Ellen's being sought in marriage by a gentleman every way desirable, but in which she had omitted, probably from inadvertence, to mention the gentleman's name. Mr. Adair's answer, now received, was to the effect that—fully relying on Mrs. Cumberland's judgment—he could not desire better for his daughter than that so suitable a marriage should be entered into ; and accorded it his cordial consent.

But this involved a most unhappy contretemps : of which no one as yet was, or could be, conscious. That first letter of Mrs. Cumberland's had alluded to Mr. Graves : *she took this consent to apply to Arthur Bohun*. It takes time, as everybody knows, for a letter to get to Australia from England and an answer to come back again. Whether, during

the lapse of weeks, Mrs. Cumberland actually forgot that her first letter had applied to Mr. Graves ; or whether in her sickness, memory had grown confused between the two, and she remembered only the last letter, must ever remain a question. Certain it was, that she took this present cordial approbation of Mr. Adair's to apply to Arthur Bohun. It might be, that she had entirely forgotten having written about Mr. Graves.

With her usual reticence, she said nothing to Ellen Adair. Not a word. Time enough for that when Arthur Bohun should speak—if he ever did speak. She held the consent ready for use if necessity ever required it ; and was at ease.

“ Ellen, how you mope ! ”

Ellen Adair looked up, faintly blushing at the abrupt charge, which came from Mrs. Cumberland.

“ Mope ! ” exclaimed Ellen.

“ My dear, you do nothing else. I don't think you like Eastsea.”

“ Not very much. At least—it is rather dull.”

“ Well, I suppose you can but find it so ; confined in-doors half my time, as I am. At

Niton you had often Captain Bohun to go out with : now you have to go alone."

Ellen turned away, a soft blush rising to her face at the remembrance of Niton. "Shall you be going home soon, do you think, Mrs. Cumberland ?" she asked.

"Oh dear no. I had a note from Jelly this morning, and she says the house is not half done. Lazy idlers, work-people are ! once you get them into a place you can't get them out. But if Jelly were ready for us, I should not go. This air is doing me good on the whole. Perhaps I shall stay the winter here."

Ellen's heart fell within her. All the autumn in this place, that verily seemed to her like the fag end of the world, and all the winter ! Should she *ever* again get the chance of seeing her heart's love, Arthur Bohun ? And he ?—perhaps he was forgetting her.

"Do you feel well enough to come out, Mrs. Cumberland ?"

"No. I am sorry, Ellen, but you must go alone. Get your things on at once, child : the afternoon will be passing."

Ellen sighed. It was of no moment to her whether she went out or stayed in : she obeyed mechanically, and went forth. Quite

alone. Generally speaking Ann attended her, but the servant was this afternoon wanted by her mistress.

The sunshine played in small sparkles on the clear blue sea, ever changing its hue for one different and more beautiful, as the light autumn clouds floated above it in the sky. Ellen Adair sat in a sheltered place and watched it. It was her favourite seat: one hewn out of the rocks, and apparently frequented only by herself, as she had never yet been disturbed in it. Except the small strip of beach before her, nothing was to be seen from it but the sea and the sky. Over-head, she could hear the children's voices at play: the tide below was coming in with gentle monotony. Ellen had a book with her, and she had her diary; she had read a few pages in the one, she had written some lines in pencil in the other: and so the hours passed, and she was utterly dreary. The weary day was but the type of the other weary days that at present made the sum total.

"Will it ever come to an end?" she murmured, having watched a tiny pleasure-boat shoot past and disappear, leaving her to her silent solitude. "Shall we ever get back to

Dallory Ham, and—and the friends that live there? I suppose a winter *might* be got through in this place, and one be alive at the end of it, but——”

A gentleman in deep mourning walking by on the strip of beach, looking this way, looking that. Ellen's thoughts were cut short summarily, and she rose with a faint cry: the cry of intense joy that is so near akin in its sound to that of exquisite pain.

For it was no other than Captain Arthur Bohun. He had not heard it; but he saw her; it was for her he had been looking: and he turned to her with an outstretched hand. For a moment she felt utterly bewildered, half doubting the reality of the vision. But oh yes, it was he; it was he! The sea, and the sky, and the rocks, and the monotony—they had all changed into paradise.

“How do you do, Ellen?”

Nothing more than this common-place greeting was spoken. They stood in silence, their hands clasped. His lips were quivering slightly, proving how ardent was the feeling that stirred him, at this, their renewed meeting; Ellen, blushing and paling by turns, was agitated almost to pain. A long look in each

other's eyes : both saw what the meeting was to the other. Sitting down quietly by her side on the ledge of rock, he accounted for his unexpected appearance. On his arrival at Eastsea that afternoon, he had gone at once to call at Mrs. Cumberland's. Ann said her mistress was lying down, and that Miss Adair was on the beach.

"Did you think I was never coming to see you, Ellen? I did. I could not get away from my uncle's while James was so ill."

"Is he—dead?" hesitated Ellen, looking pointedly at the black clothes.

"Oh no. It is a cousin of Sir Nash's and of my father's who is dead : a very old man who has lived for years in the south of France. James Bohun is very much better."

"I thought, by the deep mourning, it must be he."

"Is it deep? I suppose it looks so, being all black. We men cannot put on what you ladies call half mourning. Neither should I wish to in the present instance, for the good old man has been generous to me."

They fell into silence, each feeling the rapture of the other's presence, after the prolonged separation, as something more than

human. So intense was it that Ellen, at least, might have been content to die in it there and then. The sea changed ever its beautiful colours, the sky seemed to smile on them, the children played over-head, a flute from some unseen boat in the distance was playing softly. No: Eden never could have been sweeter than this.

"What have you been doing, all this while by yourself at Eastsea?" he at length asked her.

"Very much what I am now, I think—sitting here to watch the sea," she answered. "There has been nothing else to do. It was always dull."

"Has Mrs. Cumberland had any visitors?"

"Dr. Rane has been here twice. He gives a poor account of things at Dallory. The strike shows no signs of coming to an end; and the men are in want."

"So Dick says. I get a letter from him sometimes."

A great amount of talking, this. They lapsed into silence again. The tide turned; a big steamer went by in the distance.

"Do you hear that, Ellen?"

A man's soft tenor voice had struck up a



love song over-head : "Ellen Adair." Robin Adair, as the world more often has it. Arthur Bohun used to hear it sung as "Ellin Adair," when he was recovering from his wound in Ireland ; the Irish insisted on it that that was the original song ; and he had sometimes got Ellen to sing it so for him since. The children ceased their play ; the verses went on, and they, these unseen two below the rocks, listened to the end, catching every word distinctly.

" Yet her I loved so well,  
Still in my heart shall dwell.  
Oh ! I shall ne'er forget  
Ellen Adair."

"Nor I," softly spoke Arthur, as the refrain died away.

They quitted the seat at length. As they passed through the town, the man was singing before a house : "The Minstrel Boy." His hat was in his hand ; he looked as though he had seen better days and might have been a gentleman once. Captain Bohun put a shilling into the hat.

Mrs. Cumberland was up when they got in. Ann had told her of Captain Bohun's appearance and that he had gone to find Miss Adair.

Mrs. Cumberland took a few minutes for consideration, and then decided on her course of conduct, and that was to speak to Captain Bohun.

It might have been all very well, while she was armed with no authority, tacitly to countenance Captain Bohun's frequent visits; but now that she had authority, she deemed it right, in justice to Ellen, to take a different standing. If Captain Bohun had serious intentions, well and good; if not, she should request him to bring the intimacy to a close. Feeling the responsibility that lay upon her as the sole guardian in Europe of Ellen Adair, she thought she should be justified in saying thus much, for, unless Arthur Bohun purposed to make the young lady his wife, it was cruel to allow her to love him.

When Mrs. Cumberland once made her mind up to any resolve, she did not usually lose time in putting it in practice, and she lost none here. Taking the opportunity this same evening, when Ellen was out of the room, sent from it by herself on some errand of excuse, she spoke to Captain Bohun.

But the most fastidious man living could not have taken exception to what she said.

She spoke entirely as a lady. Captain Bohun's appearance that day at Eastsea—coupled with the remembrance of his frequent sojourns at Niton when they were staying there, and his constant visits to her house at Dallory Ham—had revived a faint idea that had sometimes presented itself to her mind, namely, that he might be growing attached to Ellen Adair. Mrs. Cumberland did not wish to enlarge on this point ; it might be, or it might not be ; Captain Bohun alone knew ; perhaps she was wholly mistaken ; all she wished to say was this—that if Captain Bohun *had* no future thoughts in regard to Miss Adair, she must request him to terminate his intimacy at once. When she got back to Dallory Ham she would be glad to see him at her house occasionally, just as any other visitor ; but nothing more.

To this Arthur Bohun answered candidly enough. He did like Ellen Adair ; if circumstances permitted he would be only too glad to make her his wife ; but, as Mrs. Cumberland knew, he had hitherto been very poor. As he pleased, Mrs. Cumberland remarked ; the matter was entirely for his own consideration ; she did not attempt to press it, one

way or the other ; if he saw no chance of his circumstances improving, he should freely say so, and terminate his visits ; she could not allow Ellen to be played with. And upon that, Arthur begged to have the night for reflection ; he would see Mrs. Cumberland in the morning, and give her his decision.

It was left at that. When Ellen returned to the room—entirely unsuspecting of what had been said during her few minutes' absence from it—Captain Bohun took his departure. Arrived at the hotel where he had put up, he devoted himself to the consideration of the grave question, weighing it in all its bearings as fairly as his love for Ellen allowed him to do. Of course that biassed him.

He had enough to marry upon now. By the death of the relative for whom he was in mourning, he had come into about eight hundred a year. With his own income, that made twelve. Quite sufficient to begin upon, though he was a Bohun. But—there were deterring considerations. In some way, as he suspected, his mother, in her fear of Ellen Adair, had contrived to instil a suspicion into the mind of Sir Nash, that Arthur, unless he were closely controlled, might be making a

very disgraceful *mésalliance*. Sir Nash had all the pride of the Bohuns, and it frightened him. He spoke to Arthur, telling him that unless he married entirely to the approbation of his family, he should never allow him to succeed to the estates. No, nor to the title if he could help it. If James died, he, Sir Nash, would marry first, and leave direct heirs.

This, it was, that now crippled the decision of Arthur. One fact was known to him—that James Bohun, since this illness set in, had joined his father in cutting off the entail, so that the threat of leaving the estates away from Arthur (even though he succeeded to the title) was easy of accomplishment. What was to be done? Part with Ellen Adair he could not. Oh, if he might but make her his wife without the world knowing it; the world abroad, and the world at home! *Might* this be? Very slowly Arthur Bohun arrived at a conclusion—that the one only plan, if Mrs. Cumberland and Ellen would accede to it, was a private marriage.

Arguments are so easy when inclination lies with them. The future looks very much as we ourselves paint it. They might be married at once, here at Eastsea. If James

Bohun recovered and lived, why there could be no question of the title or the estates lapsing to Arthur, and he might avow his marriage as soon as he pleased. If James died, he should not, as he fully believed, have to conceal it long, for he thought Sir Nash's life quite as precarious as James's. A few months, perhaps only weeks, and he might be able to tell the world that Ellen was his wife. He felt an inclination to whisper it beforehand to his good friend and aunt, Miss Bohun. But, he must first of all ascertain from Mrs. Cumberland what was the social standing of Mr. Adair. Unless he were a gentleman undeniable, Ellen could be no fit wife for a Bohun. Arthur, swayed by his love, had hitherto been content to take this assumed fact for granted; now he saw the necessity of ascertaining it more explicitly. It was not that he had any real doubt, only it was but right to make sure.


Mr. Adair held some post under the British Government, formerly in India, for a long while now in Australia. His wife had died young; his only child, Ellen, had been sent to a first-class school in England for her education. Upon its completion, Mr. Adair had

begged of Mrs. Cumberland to receive her ; he had some floating thoughts of returning home himself, so that he did not wish Ellen to go out to him. An impression was afloat in Dallory that Ellen Adair would inherit a good fortune ; also that Mrs. Cumberland received liberal remuneration for the expenses of the young lady. These generalities Arthur Bohun knew ; but he knew no more.

He paid the promised visit to Mrs. Cumberland in the morning. Ellen was on the beach with the maid ; there was no interruption, and their converse was long and confidential. Heaven alone knew how Arthur Bohun succeeded in getting Mrs. Cumberland to believe in the necessity for the marriage being kept private. He did succeed. But he used no subterfuge ; he frankly told of the prejudice his mother had taken against Ellen Adair, and that she had gained the ear of Sir Nash. In short, the same arguments he had used to himself the previous evening, he urged now. Mrs. Cumberland—naturally biassed against Madam for the injury she strove to work Dr. Rane—thought it a frightful shame that she should strive to destroy the happiness and prospects of her own son Arthur, and she

sympathized with him warmly. It was this feeling that rendered her more easy than she would otherwise have been—in short, that made her give her consent to Arthur's plan. To counteract the would-be bitter wrong contemplated by Mrs. North, she considered would be a merit on Arthur's part, instead of a sin. And then, when things were so far settled, and the speedy marriage determined on, Mrs. Cumberland astonished Captain Bohun by putting Mr. Adair's letter into his hands, explaining how it came to be received, and what she had written to that gentleman to call it forth. "So that her father's blessing will rest on the marriage," remarked Mrs. Cumberland; "but for that fact, I could not have consented to a private one."

This gave Arthur the opportunity to ask about the position of Mr. Adair, which, in the heat of argument, he had been forgetting. Certainly he was a gentleman, Mrs. Cumberland answered, and of very good Scotch family. Major Bohun, Mr. Adair; and her own husband, George Cumberland, had been firm friends in India at the time of Major Bohun's death. She could not help thinking, she added in conclusion, that it was the re-





membrance of that early friendship which induced Mr. Adair to give so ready and cordial a consent to his daughter's union with Major Bohun's son.

And so there the matter ended, all couleur-de-rose; Arthur believing that there could be no possible objection to his marrying Ellen Adair; nay, that the way had been most markedly paved for it through this letter of Mr. Adair's; Mrs. Cumberland deeming that she was not indiscreet in permitting the marriage to be a private one. Both were unsuspecting as the day. He, that there existed any real bar; she, that Mr. Adair's consent applied to a very different man from Arthur Bohun.

Captain Bohun went out from Mrs. Cumberland's in search of Ellen, with the light of love flushing his cheeks. He found her in the same favourite sheltered spot, hedged in from the gaze of the world. Again alone. The servant had gone to the shops, ribbon buying. Their salutations hitherto had been nothing but decorum and formality, as witness that of the previous day.

"Good morning," said Ellen, rising and holding out her hand.

Instead of taking it, he took *her*. Took her in his arms with a half-cry of pent-up emotion, and laid her sweet face upon his breast, kissing it with impassioned kisses. Ellen, utterly astonished, could not get away.

“Do not shrink from me, Ellen. You are going to be my wife.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LAST PROPOSAL.

AFFAIRS grew more unsatisfactory at Dallory as the weeks went on. The strike continued ; the men utterly refusing to return to work except on their own terms, or, rather, the Trades' Union refusing to allow them. Supplies to them became more scanty. If not actual famine, something near akin to it began to reign. North Inlet, once so prosperous, looked like a half-starved place out at elbows—the same as its inhabitants. Oh, what senseless folly it was ! What would it end in ? Mrs. Gass had tired of going amid the men to tell them her mind and try to bring them to reason ; but Miss Dallory went. Miss Dallory could make no impression whatever. The men were moody, miserable, three parts starved ; they would have been glad to go back to work again almost on no pay at

all, only as a relief to the present weary idleness ; but they belonged to the famous Trades' Union now, and must obey its dictates. Mary Dallory got in a passion sometimes, and asked whether they were men, or cravens, that they had no pity for their poor helpless children.

One day Mrs. Gass and Miss Dallory went forth together. Not of premeditation. One of Ketler's children was ill and weakly ; incipient consumption, Dr. Rane said ; she was a sweet little child, mild and gentle ; and Miss Dallory would sometimes carry her strengthening things. It was a frightful shame, she would tell Ketler, that he should let even this poor sick little one starve : and Ketler humbly acknowledged to his own heart that the child *was* starving ; and felt it to his backbone. The man was as well meaning a man as heaven ever sent into the world ; anxious to do his duty : but he had signed himself a member of the Trades' Union, and completely helpless.

Miss Dallory wore a print gown, and was altogether a vast deal less fine than Jelly. She had a small basket in her hand, containing fresh eggs. As she passed Mrs. Gass's

that lady was standing at her open parlour window, in all the glory of a gorgeous green satin robe, and white bonnet with bird-of-paradise feather. She dearly loved rich clothes, and saw no reason why she should not wear them.

"Where be you bound to, my dear?" asked the grandly-dressed lady, as Mary stopped.

"I want to take these eggs to little Cissy Ketler. Mrs. Gass, I cannot *think* what is to become of all the poor children if this state of things should last much longer."

"I'm sure I can't. It goes again the grain to see 'em want; but when we give 'em food or help, it's just so much premium offered to the father's incorrigible obstinacy and idleness, my dear."

"But the child is sick," said Mary Dallory.  
"And so are many other children."

"They'll be worse afore long. My dear, I was not a talking at you, in saying that. But I don't see where it's all to end. We can't set up hospitals for the children and women, even with the best will to do it. And the will, I, for one, have not. Once get their wives and children took care of, and the men 'ud lead the lives of gentlemen to the close o'

the chapter. Here ; I'll walk with you, my dear ; and we can talk going along."

She came forth, drawing on her lemon-coloured gloves : and they went towards Ketler's. North Inlet looked deserted to-day. Not a man was lounging in it. The few stragglers to be seen were walking along briskly in the direction of the works ; as if they had business on hand, and were without their pipes. Mrs. Gass arrested one who was passing her.

"What's up, Dawson ?"

"We've been called together, ma'am, to meet Mr. Richard North. He have got som'at to say to us. Happen, may be, he's a going to give in at last."

"Is he !" retorted Mrs. Gass. "I don't think you need worrit your inside with that idea, Dawson. It's a deal more likely that he's going to warn you he'll sell the works out and out—if he can get any fool to buy 'em."

The man passed on. Mrs. Gass, as she turned to speak to Miss Dallory, gave a flourish with her small white lace parasol and a toss to the bird-of-paradise.

"Had anybody told me men could be so obstinate, in regard to thinking theirselves in

the right, I'd not have believed it: but seeing's believing. My dear, suppose we just step on to the works, and learn what the matter is that Mr. Richard has in hand."

The men, going in at the iron gates, branched round to their own entrance. Mrs. Gass took Miss Dallory to a private one. It led at once into what might now be called the audience chamber, for Richard North was already haranguing the men in it: a long and rather narrow room, with a counter running across it. It used to be the pay-room of the men: perhaps some of them, entering it now, recalled those prosperous days with a sigh. Richard North did not see the ladies come in. He stood with his back to them, in his usual every-day attire, a plain black frock coat and gray trousers, with fine white linen. His hands rested on the counter as he talked to the men, who faced him on the other side of it; a crowd of them, all with attentive countenances. Mrs. Gass signed to Miss Dallory to halt: not to conceal themselves from Richard, but simply lest their advance should interrupt what he was saying. And so they remained listening, Richard unconscious that

he had any other audience than his work-people.

The matter was this. A contract had just been offered to North and Gass. It was one of value, and would certainly, if accepted, keep the men employed for some time. It was offered at a certain price. Richard North made his calculations and found that he could accept it, provided the men would work on the former terms : but he could not if the rate of wages had to be raised. Considering the present hopeless condition of the men, imagining that they must have had pretty nearly sufficient experience of idleness and empty cupboards to bring them to, at least, exercise reason, he determined to lay the proposal before them—that they might accept or reject it. In a clear and concise manner he stated this, and the men heard him respectfully to the end. One of them then advanced a few steps before the rest, and answered. Answered without the smallest deliberation ; without so much as a pretence of inquiring what the feelings of his fellows might be.

“ We can’t do it, sir.”

Richard North raised his hand for silence, as if the man had spoken before his time.



“Do you fully understand the case in all its bearing?” resumed Richard; “if not, take time to reflect until you do understand it. Look at it comprehensively; take into consideration the future as well as the present. Listen again. This contract has been offered me: it is a good one, as you must know. It will set our works going again; it will be the means of bringing back the business that seems to be drifting more hopelessly away from us day by day. It will provide you with employment, with wages that you not so long ago thought liberal; and will place you again in what may be called prosperity—great prosperity as compared with what exists at present. Your homes may be homes of plenty again, your children can eat and drink. In short, both to you and to me, this contract offers just the turn of the tide. I wish to accept it; I see nothing but ruin before my father and myself if I cannot: what I see before you I do not care to speak of, if you are not wise enough to see it for yourselves. The decision lies with you, unfortunately; I wish it lay with myself. Shall I take it, or shall I not?”

“We couldn’t return at them rate of wages

nohow," spoke up a voice from the thick of the throng.

"It is the last chance that I shall offer you," proceeded Richard. "For your sakes I would strongly advise you to take it. Heaven is my witness that I am honest in saying 'for your sakes.' We have been associated together for many years, and I cannot see the breaking-up of old ties without first using every effort to re-unite them. I must give my answer to-morrow, and accept this work or reject it. Little time is allowed me for decision, therefore I am unable to give much to you. Virtually the acceptance or rejection lies with you; for, without you, I could not fulfil it: but I cannot help a remark in passing, that for such a state of things to exist argues something rotten at the core in the relations between master and men. At six o'clock to-morrow morning the great bell shall be rung, calling you to work as formerly. My men, I hope you will all respond to it."

No, not at the terms offered, was the answer gathered by Richard North from the buzz that rose around.

"I cannot offer you better."

“No—and no. Not at them.”

“I have said that this is the last chance,” repeated Richard. “I shall never give you the option of working for me again.”

The men couldn't help that. (The fact was, they only three parts believed it.) One ventured a supposition that if the works were sold, the new firm that bought might give them work on new terms.

“No,” said Richard North. “I am very different from you, my men. You see work at your hand, and will not do it. You look forward to the future with (as I must suppose) easy apathy, giving neither care nor anxiety how you and your families are to live. I, on the contrary, am only anxious to work ; at a reduced rate of profit, on a smaller scale if it must be ; but, any way, to work. Night after night I lie awake, tormented with lively apprehensions for the future. What seemed, when you first turned out, to be a mere temporary stoppage, that reason and good sense on both our sides could not fail to rectify, has assumed gigantic proportions and a permanent aspect. After some time I gave way ; offering to split the difference, as to wages, if you would return——”

"But we wanted the whole," came an interruption. "And you didn't give way as to time."

"I could not do either," said Richard North, firmly. "I offered all I was able. That is a thing of the past : let it go. I now make you this last and final offer ; and I think it only fair to tell you what my course will be if you reject it. I shall go over to Belgium and see if I cannot engage Belgian workmen to come here and take your places."

A dead silence fell on the room. Ketler broke it.

"You'd surely not do that, sir !"

"Not do it ! Why you force it on me. I must either get a new set of men, or else give up the works entirely. As I do not feel inclined to the latter course, the former alone is open to me."

"We'll have none o' them Belgiums here !" cried a threatening voice from the outskirts of the crowd.

"Allow me to tell you, Thoms, to tell you all, that the Belgians will not ask your leave to come," spoke Richard, drawing his head to its full height. "Would you act the part of dogs-in-the-manger ? I offer *you* the work ;

offer it *now*; and I heartily wish you to accept it. But if you do not, I shall certainly endeavour to get others here who will."

"Drat them Belgicks! Who be *they* that they should snatch the bread out of honest Englishmen's mouths!"

"What are the honest Englishmen about, to let them snatch it?" retorted Richard. "Look here, my men; listen," he continued, as he leaned forward and raised his hands impressively. "If you (I speak of the country's hands collectively) refuse to work, it can signify very little to you practically whether the work goes to Belgium (or elsewhere) to be done, or whether strangers come and do it here. *It must end in one or the other.*"

"It shan't never end in them frogs o' foreigners coming here," spoke Thoms again, vexed that his voice should have been recognized by Richard North. And this second interruption was hissed down by his more sensible comrades; who sharply bade him hold his tongue, and hear the master. Richard put up his hand.

"We will take it, for the moment's argument, at what Thoms says—that strangers would not, or should not, come here. In that

case the other result must supervene—that the work of the country would pass away from it. It has already begun to pass ; you know it, my men ; and so do your rulers the Trades' Unions. How it affects their nerves I don't pretend to say ; but, when once this tide of desolation has set in fairly as a settled result, there won't be much need of their agitation. As truly as that I live, as that I now stand here and speak to you, I believe this will come. In different parts of the country whole places are being dismantled—the work has left it. Do you suppose North Inlet is the only spot where the provision shops may as well be closed because the men have no longer money to spend in them ? Any newspaper you take up will tell you to the contrary. Read about the ship-building in the East of London : how it has gone away, and whole colonies of men are left behind starving. Gone to Scotland ; to the banks of the Tyne ; gone anywhere that men can be found to work. It is the same with other trades. Whose fault is this ? —Why the men's own."

Murmurs. "No. No."

"No ! Why, here's a very present illustration of it. Whose fault is it that my works

here are shut up, and you are living in idleness—or, we'll say starving in idleness, if you like the word better. If I am unable to take this present contract now offered, and it goes elsewhere, whose doings will it be, but yours? Don't talk nonsense, my men. It is all very well to say that the Trades' Unions don't allow you to take the work. I have nothing to do with that: you and the Unions may divide the responsibility between you."

"The fact is, sir, that we are not our own masters," said Ketler.

"Just so. And it seems that you cannot, or will not, emancipate yourselves from your new slavery and become again your own masters. However, I did not call you together to go over this old ground, but to lay before you the option of returning to work. You have the day to consider of it. At six o'clock to-morrow the call-bell will ring——"

"'T won't be of no use ringing it, sir," interrupted Ketler, some sadness in his tone.

"At six o'clock to-morrow morning the call-bell here will ring," authoritatively repeated Richard North. "You respond to it and I shall heartily welcome you back. If you do not, my refusal must go in, and the job will

lapse from me. If we part to-day it is our final parting, for I shall at once take measures to secure a fresh set of workpeople. Though I get but ten together at first, and the work I undertake be insignificant in proportion, *I'll get them*. It will be something like beginning life again : and you will have forced it on me."

"And of all pig-headed idiotics that mortal master ever had to deal with, sure you men be the worst!"

The undignified interruption emanated from Mrs. Gass. Richard looked round, in great surprise ; perhaps all the greater when he saw also Miss Dallory. Mrs. Gass came forward ; talking here, talking there ; her bird-of-paradise nodding time to her words. As usual she told the men some home truths ; sounding none the less forcibly because her language was as their own—homely.

"Is this true?" asked Miss Dallory in a low tone, as Richard went back to shake hands with her. "Shall you really re-open the works again with another set of men?"

"Yes—if these do not return. It will be better, however quietly I may have to begin, than going out to seek my fortune in the world. At least, I have lately been thinking so."



"Will the men return?"

"I am afraid to give you my true opinion. Lest it should seem like a bad omen."

"And now you have given it me. It is also mine. They are blind, to infatuation."

"Not so much blind, I think, as that they are—I have just said so to them—in a state of slavery from which they dare not emancipate themselves."

"And who would?—under the specious promises of the Trades' Unions? Don't blame them too much, Mr. Richard North. If some great strong body came down on you and me with all kinds of agitation and golden promises for the future, we might believe in them too."

Richard shook his head. "Not if the great strong body lived by the agitation: and took our hard-earned money to keep themselves and the golden promises going."

Mary Dallory laughed a little. "Shall you ring that great bell in the morning?"

"Yes. Certainly I shall."

"Ah, well—the men will only laugh at you from their beds. But I dare say you can stand that. Oh dear me! What need there is that the next world should be great and good, when this is so foolish a one!"

The meeting had broken up. Richard North and some few of the more intelligent of the men—those who had filled the more important posts at the works—remained talking yet together. Mrs. Gass, and Mary Dallory with her basket of fresh eggs, went away together.

Women stood about with anxious faces, watching for the news. They were tired of the strike : heartsick, as some of them feelingly expressed it. Nothing teaches like experience : the women were as eager for the strike at one time as ever the men could be, believing it would bring a tide of prosperity in its wake. They had not bargained for what it had brought : misery, and dismantled homes, and semi-starvation. But for being obliged to keep up as others did—as we all have to do, whatever may be the life's struggles, the heart's bitter care—there were those amidst them who would have lain down to die in sheer hopelessness.

Mrs. Ketler stood at her door in a tattered black net cap—the once tidy woman. She was shading the sun from her eyes as she looked out for her husband. It prevented her noticing the approach of the ladies ; and when they accosted her she backed into her house in

her timid fashion, rather startled, attempting some words as by way of apology. The little girl who was sick—a wan child of seven years old—was being nursed by one somewhat older. Miss Dallory looked round to see that there was a chair left capable of being sat upon, and took the invalid on her own lap. Nearly all the available things the house once contained had been parted with ; either pledged or sold. Miss Dallory gave the eggs to the mother, and a half-pint bottle of beef tea that lay at the bottom of the basket.

“How is Cissy to-day ?” she asked tenderly of the child.

“Cissy tired,” was the little one’s answer.

“Has Cissy finished the strawberry jam ?”

Cissy nodded.

“Then let your big boy come to Ham Court for some more,” said Miss Dallory, turning to the mother.

The “big boy” was the eldest. He had been employed at the works, but was of course condemned to be idle, like the rest.

“Bain’t you pretty nigh tired of this sort o’ thing,” demanded Mrs. Gass, who had come to an anchor on a wooden bucket turned upside-down.

The woman knew what she meant by "this sort o' thing," and gave a groan. It was very expressive, showing *how* tired she was of it, and how hopeless were prospects of any change.

"I've heard about the master's offer, ma'am; but the men mean to reject it," she said. "Smith stopped to tell me as he went by. The Lord above knows what is to become of us!"

"If the men do reject it, they'll deserve to sit for the rest of their lives on a iron plough-share with all its spikes sticking into 'em," retorted Mrs. Gass—her own present uncomfortable seat probably suggesting the idea. "Any way, I hope they'll never get the pricks out o' their consciences."

"It's the Trades' Union," said the woman in a low tone, giving a scared look around. "The men can't do as they would."

"Not do as they would!" echoed Mrs. Gass. "Don't *you* pick up their folly and retail it to me again, Susan Ketler. If the men was fools enough to be drawn into joining the Union at first—and I'd not blame 'em too much for that, for the best of us gets led away at times by fair promises that turn out in the

end to be smoke, or worse—they ought not to be so pig headed as to keep there. Now that they've seen what good that precious Trades' Union is doing for 'em, and what it's likely to do, they should buckle on the armour of their common sense and leave it. Mr. Richard North has this day gave them the opportunity of doing so. Every man Jack of 'em can go back to work to-morrow morning at the ringing of the bell : and take up again with good wages and comfort. If they refuse they'll be not so much fools as something worse, Susan Ketler : they'll be desperately wicked."

"They are afraid," murmured the woman. "They have tied themselves by word and bond to the Union."

"Then let 'em *untie* themselves. Don't tell me, Susan Ketler. Afraid? What of? Could the Union kill 'em for it? Could the men be hung and drawn-and-quartered for leaving it? Who *is* the Union? Giants that were born with thunderbolts in their hands and power from the Creator to use 'em to control people's wills?—or just simple men like themselves : workmen too once, some of 'em, if reports are true. You'd better not try to come over me with your fallacies, Susan Ketler. Facts is

facts, and reason's reason. If these men *chose* to do it, they could send the Trades' Union to the right about this day, and come back, with one accord, to work and their senses to-morrow. Who's to hinder it?"

Susan Ketler ventured to say no more. She only wished she dared say as much to her husband and the men. But, what with common sense, as Mrs. Gass called it, on the one side, and the Trades' Union sophistries pulling on the other, the steering along in North Inlet just now was perplexing in the extreme. Mrs. Gass rose from her uneasy seat, and departed with Mary Dallory.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AT NIGHT : UNDER THE CEDAR-TREE.

THERE was commotion that day in Dal-  
lory. An offer like this of Richard  
North's, coming as it did in the very midst of  
distress and prolonged privation, could not be  
rejected off-hand without some dissenting  
voices. The few men who had not joined the  
Union, who only wished to get back to work,  
pleaded for its acceptance as if they were  
pleading for very life. Strangers also—that  
is, gentlemen who had no direct interest in  
the question—went about amid the men,  
striving to impress upon them where their  
obligations lay, and what their course ought  
to be. One of these was Dr. Rane. There  
had been a good deal of sickness lately—when  
is there not where privation reigns?—and  
the doctor's services were in much requisition.

In every house he went that day, to every workman with whom he came in contact, he spoke forcibly and kindly : urging them most strongly not to reject this opportunity of putting themselves right with the world. It was one, he said, that might never occur again, if neglected now. Dr. Rane, while blaming the men, was sorry for them ; pityingly sorry for their wives and children.

He had had a very fatiguing day. When the dusk of evening came on, he went and sat in the garden, tired and weary. Bessy was gone to spend the evening at Ham Court with Mary Dallory ; and the doctor had promised to fetch her home. His ruminations still ran, as ever, on the getting away from Dallory ; but at present there seemed to be little chance of his doing it : unless he could dispose of his practice here, he would not have the wherewithal to establish himself in another place. Had Oliver Rane been a less healthy man than he really was, he would long ago have thought himself into a nervous fever.

It grew darker. Dr. Rane struck his repeater—for it was too dark to see—wondering whether it was time to go for his wife. No ; not quite he found ; he could delay



another quarter of an hour yet. And he lapsed back into his musings.

The seat he had chosen was underneath the great cedar tree at the extreme corner of the garden, close to the wire fence that divided his ground from Mrs. Cumberland's, and also close against that lady's back door. An intervening leafy foliage of clematis and woodbine would have hidden him from anyone on the other side even at daylight, and Dr. Rane felt as much in private as he would have been in an African desert. From his own troubles his thoughts went roaming off to other matters: to the long sojourn of his mother at Eastsea, to wondering when she meant to come home; and thence on to speculate on what the workmen's answer to Richard North's call would be.

"Will they show the white feather still? and it is nothing less, this cowardly grovelling to the dictates of the Union," soliloquised Dr. Rane; "or will they respond to Dick like men of sense, and go back to him? But for those agitators——"

"I can tell you what it is, Mr. Tim Wilks—if you don't choose to keep your time and your promises, you need not trouble yourself

to come worrying after me later. A good two mortal hours by the clock have I been at Green's waiting for *you*."

The above, succeeding to the sound of footsteps in the lane, and uttered in the sharpest tones of Jelly, cut short the musings of Dr. Rane. A short squabble ensued: Jelly scolding; Tim Wilks breathlessly explaining. From what the doctor, sitting in silence, and unsuspected, could gather, it appeared that Jelly must have had some appointment with Tim (no doubt of her own imperious making) which he had failed to keep, and that he had come running after her, only catching her up at the garden door.

Jelly put the key in the lock, and stepped inside the garden: the servants sometimes chose that way of entrance in preference to the front. During the absence of Mrs. Cumberland Jelly acted as the house's mistress, entertained her friends, and went in and out at will. Mr. Wilks meekly remained where he was, not daring to cross the threshold without her permission.

"Is it too late for me to come in, Miss Jelly?" asked he.

"Yes, it is too late," retorted Jelly; the

pair of them not having the slightest notion that any eavesdropper was near. Though the word could not justly be applied to Dr. Rane : he did not want to hear what was said ; felt rather annoyed at the noise and the interruption.

"I couldn't get home before," resumed Timothy, "though I'm sure I nearly ran my legs off all the way from Whitborough. When a young man has his day's work to perform, and that in a lawyer's office, he is obliged to stop in beyond hours if required."

"Don't tell me," said Jelly, who stood with the half-closed door in her hand in the most inhospitable manner. "You could have come home if you chose."

"But I couldn't, Miss Jelly."

"You are always stopping beyond hours now. That is, *saying* that you are."

"Because we have been so busy lately," answered Tim. "Our head clerk, Repton, is away through illness, and it puts more work on us others. Dale's as cranky as he can be : he works us like horses. If you'll believe me, Miss Jelly, I didn't have time to go out and get any tea. I've not had bit or drop inside me since one o'clock to-day."

This piteous view of affairs a little mollified Jelly ; and she dropped her tart tone. Dr. Rane was wishing the talkers would go away. He would have gone himself, but that he did not altogether care to betray his proximity.

"Why does that old Dale not get another clerk?" demanded Jelly. "I should tell him plainly if I were you, Tim, that going without my regular meals did not suit me."

"We should not dare to say that. Much he'd listen if we did! As to getting another clerk, I believe he is doing it. Repton's doctor says he'll never be well again, so Dale thinks it's of no good waiting for him."

"You were to be put up in Repton's place, if ever he went out of it," said Jelly, quickly.

"I know I was"—and Timothy Wilks's voice took so strangely rueful a tone that it might have made Dr. Rane laugh under more open circumstances. "But when Dale made that promise, Miss Jelly, you see the affair of the anonymous letter had not taken place."

"What anonymous letter?"

"The one that killed Edmund North."

"Why, you don't mean to insinuate that Dale lays the blame of that on *you*?"

"I don't suppose he thinks I sent it. In-

deed I'm sure he does not. But he was anything but pleasant over it to me at the time, and he has never been quite the same to me since."

"He is an unjust owl," said Jelly.

"One does not look for much else than injustice from lawyers."

"Does Dale say that letter is the reason of his not promoting you to Repton's place?"

"He doesn't say it: but I know just as well, that it is so, as if he did."

Jelly struck the key two or three times against the door. She was thinking.

"That's through your tongue, Timothy Wilks. You know you did talk of the matter out of the office."

"They say so," confessed Timothy. "But if I did, I'm sure I've been punished enough for it. It's hard that it should stick to me always like pitch. Why don't they find the writer of the letter, and plaster *him*? He was the villain; not me."

"So he was," said Jelly. "Tim, what would you say if I told you I knew who it was?"

"I? Excuse me, Miss Jelly, but I should not quite believe it."

Jelly laughed. Not a loud laugh, was it, but rather derisive, and full of *power*. Its peculiar significance penetrated through the slender thicket of green, to him who was seated under the cedar-tree, betraying to him all too surely that Jelly knew his dangerous secret. Even Tim Wilks, less sensitive, was struck with the sound.

"Surely, Miss Jelly, you do not mean that you know who wrote the letter?"

"I could put my finger out from where I now stand, Tim, and lay it on the right person," she answered in a low, impressive tone, little suspecting how literally true were the words.

Tim seemed struck aghast. He drew a deep breath.

"Then, why don't you, Miss Jelly?"

"Because—" Jelly stopped short. "Well, because there are certain considerations that make it inconvenient to speak."

"But you ought to speak. Indeed you ought, Miss Jelly. If Lawyer Dale got to hear of this, he'd tell you that it's quite obligatory."

Again there broke forth a laugh from Jelly. But quite a different laugh this time—one of

light mirth. Tim decided that she had been only laughing at *him*. He resented it in his heart, as much as he was capable of resenting anything.

"You shouldn't make game of a young man in this manner, Miss Jelly! I'm sure I thought you were in earnest. You'd make a fine play-actor."

"Shouldn't I?" assented Jelly, "and take in the audience nicely, as I take in you. Well," changing her tone, "you must be soft, Tim Wilks! The idea of believing that *I* could know who wrote the letter?"

The hint about Lawyer Dale had frightened Jelly, bringing back the prudence which her impulsive sympathy with Tim's wrongs had momentarily scared away. All she could do, then, was to strive to undo the impression raised. There existed certain considerations, and they made it, as she had aptly said, inconvenient to speak. But she felt vexed with herself, and resented it on Tim.

"Look here," cried she, "I can't stand at this gate all night, jabbering with you; so you can just betake yourself off. And the next time you make a promise to be home by a certain hour to take a late cup of tea with

friends at Mrs. Green's, I'll trouble you to keep it. Mind that, Mr. Wilks."

Mr. Wilks had his nose round the post, and was beginning some deprecatory rejoinder, but Jelly slammed the door, and nearly snapped the nose off. Locking it with a click, she put the key in her pocket, and marched on to the house.

Leaving Dr. Rane alone to the night dews under the heavy cedar tree. *Were* the dews falling?—or was it that his own face gave out the damp moisture that lay on it? He sat still as death.

So, then, Jelly did know of it! as he had before half-suspected; and he had been living, *was* living, with a sword suspended over him. It mattered not to speculate upon how she acquired the terrible secret: she knew it, and that was enough. Dr. Rane had not felt very safe before; but now it seemed to him as though he were treading on the extreme verge of a precipice, whose edge was crumbling from under him. There could be no certainty at any moment that Jelly would not declare what she knew: to-morrow—the next day—the day after: how could he tell which day or hour it might be? Oliver Rane wiped



his face, his hand anything but a steady one.

The "certain considerations that made it inconvenient to speak," to which Jelly had confessed, meant that she was in service with Mrs. Cumberland, and that he was Mrs. Cumberland's son. While Jelly retained her place, she would not perhaps be deliberately guilty of the bad faith of betraying, as it were, her mistress. Not deliberately: but there were so many chances that might lead to it. Lawyer Dale's questionings might bring it about—and who could answer for it that such might not at once set in at a word from Wilks?—or she might be quitting Mrs. Cumberland's place—or taking upon herself to right Tim with the world—or speaking, as she had evidently spoken that night, upon impulse. Yes, yes; there were a hundred and one chances now of his betrayal!

He must get away from Dallory without delay. "Out of sight, out of mind," runs the old proverb—and it certainly seemed to Dr. Rane that if *he* were out of sight the chances of betrayal would be wonderfully lessened. He could battle with it better, too, at a distance, if discovery came: perhaps wholly

keep it from his wife. Never a cloud had come between him and Bessy: rather than let *this* disclosure come to her—that he had been the one who caused her brother's death—he would have run away with her to the wilds of Africa. Or, perhaps from her.

Run away! The thought brought a remembrance to his mind. That self-same morning another letter had arrived from his friend in America, Dr. Jones. Dr. Jones had again urged on Oliver Rane his acceptance of the offer—to join his practice there—that he had previously made, saying it was an opportunity he might never again have throughout his life-time. Dr. Rane fully believed it: it was, beyond doubt, a very excellent offer; but, alas! he had not the requisite money to embrace it. Five hundred pounds—besides the expenses of the voyage and the removal: Dr. Rane had not, to spare, five hundred shillings. The tontine money came flashing through his brain. Oh, if he could but get it!

The air grew really damp; but he still sat in the dark under the shade of the cedar-tree, reviewing plans and projects, ways and means. To him it was growing as a very matter of life or death.

How long he sat, he knew not : but by-and-by the faint sound of Dallory church clock was wafted to him through the clear air. He counted the strokes—ten. Ten? *Ten?* Dr. Rane started up : he ought to have gone for his wife long and long ago.

Boom ! boom ! boom ! Six o'clock in the morning ; and the great bell ringing out from the works of North and Gass ! It was a bell Dallory had not heard of late, and sleepy people turned in their beds. Many had been listening for it, knowing it was going to be rung : some got up and looked from their windows to see whether the street became alive with workmen, or whether it remained silent.

Richard North was within the works. He had come out thus early, hoping to welcome his men. Three or four entered with him. The bell rang its accustomed time, and then ceased ; its sound dying away, and leaving a faint echo in the air. There was no other answer : the men had not responded to the call. Nothing more, than that faint vibration of sound, remained to tell of the appeal made by Richard North.

Richard North threw up, compulsorily, the offered contract ; and proceeded on a journey without loss of time. Some said he went to Scotland, some to Belgium : but the utmost known about it was that his departure had reference to business. But that he was a temperate man, and given to pity as much as to blame, he could have cursed the men's blind folly. What was to become of them ? The work was there, and they drove it away from their doors, driving all chance with it of regaining prosperity. They were forcing him to their supersedure : they were bringing despair, famine, death upon a place where content and comfort had used to reign. Yes, death : as you will find later. Sure never did greater blindness, than this, fall on mortal sight !

Days went on, and grew into weeks : not many : and Richard North was still absent. Prospects seemed to be looking gloomy on all sides. To make matters worse, some cases of fever began to manifest themselves at Dallory. Dr. Rane and his brother practitioner, Mr. Seeley, only wondered that something of the kind had not broken out before.

Amidst other places that wore an air of

gloom was the interior of Dallory Hall. Madam's insatiable demands for money had been very partially responded to of late: not at all since the absence of Richard. Even she, with all her imperious scorn of whence supplies came, provided they did come, began to realize the fact that gold can no more be drawn from exhausted coffers than blood from a stone. It did not tend to render her temper sweeter.

She sat one morning in what she was pleased to call her boudoir—a charming apartment opening from her dressing-room. Several letters lay before her, brought up by her maid: she had carelessly tossed them aside for some hours, but was getting to them now when it was near mid-day. Not very pleasant letters, any of them, to judge by Madam's dark face. One was from Sidney at Hom-burg, imploring for assistance (which had not recently been sent him) in a piteous manner; two or three were rather urgent demands for the payment of private accounts of Madam's rather long delayed; one was a polite excuse from Frank Dallory and his sister for not accepting a dinner invitation. There was not a single pleasant letter amidst the lot.

"I wonder what Dick North means by staying away like this!—and leaving orders at Ticknell's that no cheques are to be cashed!" growled Madam in self-soliloquy. "He ought to be here. He ought to force those miserable men of his back to work, whether they will or not. He's away; Arthur's away; Sidney's away: and, with this uncertain state of things out-doors and trouble in, the house is worse than a dungeon. People seem to be getting shy of it: even Mary Dallory stays without the gates. That girl's an artful flirt: as Matilda said yesterday. If Arthur and Dick were back she'd come fast enough: I should like to know which of the two she most cares for. It is absurd though, to speak of her in conjunction with Dick North. *Dick North!* As well suppose she would take up with one of his workmen. I think I'll go off somewhere for a while. Should it be true, this suspicion of fever, the place will not be safe. I shall want a hundred pounds or two. And Sidney must have money. He says he'll do something desperate if I don't send it—but he has said that before. Confound it all! Why does not gold grow upon trees?"

Madam's dress this morning was a striped lilac silk of amazing rustle and richness. Letting it all out behind her, she went down the stairs and through the hall, sweeping the dust along in a little cloud. Mr. North was not in his parlour: Madam went about, looking for him; sweeping still.

To her surprise she found him in the drawing-room: it was not often he ventured into that exclusive place. He had a shabby long coat on down to his heels, and a straw hat. Madam's scornful head went up fifteen inches when she saw him there.

"What do you want?" she asked in a tone that plainly said he had about as much right in the room as an unwelcome stranger.

"I have come to beg a bit of cotton of Matilda to tie up these flowers," was Mr. North's answer, showing some in his hand—and indeed it was only then he was preferring the request. "Thomas Hepburn's little boy is here, and I thought I'd give the child a posy."

"A pōsy!" mockingly repeated Madam, despising the homely term.

"I have no cotton," said Matilda, who lay back in a chair, reading. "What should bring cotton in a drawing-room?"

"Ah well—I can bind a piece of the variegated grass round," said Mr. North with resignation. "I'm sorry to have troubled you, Matilda."

"And when you have disposed of your 'posy,' I am coming to your parlour," said Madam.

Mr. North groaned as he went out. He knew what "coming to his parlour" meant—that his peace would be destroyed for the day. There were moments when he thought heart and mind and brain must alike give way under home worries and Madam's.

"When did this come?" enquired Madam, pointing to a letter that stood upright on the mantel-piece: one addressed to Richard North, in her son Arthur's writing.

"This morning," shortly answered Matilda, not looking up from her book.

"Yes, Arthur can write often enough to Dick. This is the second letter that has come for him within a week. What did you do with the other?" Madam broke off to ask.

"Put it into Dick's room against he comes home."

"But Arthur does not trouble himself to write to us, or to let us know aught of his



movements," resumed Madam. "We have not had a syllable from him since he wrote word that old Bohun was dead. Is he still in London?—or at his aunt's?—or where?"

"I'm sure I don't know where," retorted Matilda, fractious at being interrupted.

Neither did she care. Madam turned the letter over in idle curiosity: but the post-mark was illegible, not to be deciphered. Leaving it on the mantel-piece, she went to look after Mr. North. He stood on the lawn, doing something to a dwarf-tree of small and most beautiful roses. There was some wind to-day, and the skirts of his coat waved a little in the breeze.

"Did you hear what I said—that I was coming to your parlour?" demanded Madam, swooping down upon him majestically. "*Money must be had.* I want it; Sidney wants it; the house wants it. I——"

Mr. North had straightened himself. Desperation gave him a little courage.

"I'd give it you if I had it. I have always given it you. But what is to be done when I have it not? You must see that it is not my fault, Madam."

"I see that when money is needed it is your place to get it," coolly returned Madam. "Sidney cannot live upon air. He——"

"It seems to me that he lives upon gold," Mr. North interrupted in a querulous voice. "There's no end to it."

"Sidney must have money," equably went on Madam. "I must have it, for I purpose going away for a time. You will therefore——"

"Goodness me! here's the telegraph man."

This second interruption was also from Mr. North. Telegraphic messages were somewhat rare at Dallory Hall; and its master went into a fluster. His fears flew to his well-beloved son, Dick. The messenger was coming up the broad walk, a despatch in his hand. Mr. North advanced to meet him; Madam sailing behind.

"It is for Captain Bohun, sir," spoke up the man, perceiving something of Mr. North's tremor.

"For Captain Bohun!" interposed Madam. "Where's it from?"

"London, Madam."

Motioning to the messenger to go to the house and get his receipt, she tore it open

without the smallest ceremony, and read its contents :

“ Dr. Williams to Arthur Bohun, Esq.

“ James Bohun is dying. Sir Nash wishes you to come up without delay.”

Looking here, looking there, stood Madam, her thoughts busy. Where could Arthur be ? Why had he left London ?

“ Do *you* know ?” she asked roughly of Mr. North.

“ Know what, Madam ?”

“ Where Arthur Bohun is.”

Mr. North stared a little. “ Why, how should I know ?” he asked. “ It’s ever so long since Arthur wrote to me. He sends me messages when he writes to Dick.”

Madam swept in to the drawing-room. She took the letter from the mantel-piece, and coolly broke its black seal asunder. Even Matilda’s scruples were aroused at this.

“ Oh, mamma, don’t !” she exclaimed, starting up and putting her hand over the letter. “ Don’t open that. It would not be right.”

Madam dexterously twitched the letter away, carried it to the window and read it from end to end. Matilda saw her face turn ghastly through its paint, as if with fright.

"Serves her right," thought the young lady.  
"Mamma, what is amiss?"

Madam crumpled the letter into a ball of creases in her agitated hand: but no answer came from her white lips. Turning abruptly up the stairs, she locked herself into her chamber.

"She is in a passion of fright—whatever the cause may be," quoth Miss Matilda, in self soliloquy.

Ere the day had closed, the household was called upon to witness Madam's sudden departure by train. She went alone: and gave not the slightest clue where she might be going, or when she would be back.

Matilda North had aptly worded the paroxysm: "a passion of fright." Madam was in both. For that rifled letter had given her the news of Arthur Bohun's present place of locality—and that he was by the side of Ellen Adair. What had become of Dick? the letter asked. He must make haste and come, or he would be too late. Madam did not understand at all. There followed a mysterious intimation to Dick; to Dick, whom Arthur so trusted and who was true as steel; it was more obscure even than the rest; but it.

seemed to hint at—yes, to hint at—marriage. Marriage? Madam felt her flesh creep all over.

“A son of mine marry *her*!” she breathed.  
“Heaven help me to avert the danger.”

About the last woman, one would think, who ought to call for help from Heaven.

## CHAPTER X.

### A SECOND FLY AT THE DOOR.

THE tide came rippling up on the sea shore in gentle ridges of sparkling foam, with a monotonous, soothing murmur. The waves to-day showed themselves not; the air was densely still: but in the western sky little black clouds were rising, no bigger yet than a man's hand; and as the weather-wise old fishermen glanced to the spot, they foretold a storm.

Two people, pacing the beach side by side, regarded neither the sea nor the threatened storm. Need you be told who they were?—Arthur Bohun and Ellen Adair. What were the winds and the waves to them in their trance of happiness? Amidst the bitter misery that was soon to set in for both of them, the recollection of this short time spent at East-sea, these few weeks since their love had been declared, and their marriage was approaching, would seem like an impossible dream.

The private marriage, consented to by Mrs. Cumberland, must not be confounded with a secret marriage. It was to be kept from the world in general: but not from every friend they possessed. Mrs. Cumberland intended to be present as Ellen's guardian; and she, very much urged that some friend of Arthur's should also attend. He acquiesced, and fixed on Richard North. Captain Bohun purposed to tell his aunt, Miss Bohun, his true friend in every way; but not until the wedding was over: he would trust nobody beforehand, he said, save Mrs. Cumberland and Dick. Even Dick he did not trust yet. He commanded Dick's presence at Eastsea, telling him that his coming was imperative; that there must be no refusal. Finding Dick did not respond in any way, Arthur wrote again; but still only mysteriously. The first letter was the one put aside by Miss Matilda North, the second was the one opened by Madam.

But there were moments when, in spite of his happiness, Arthur Bohun had qualms of conscience for his precipitation: and the more especially did they press upon him immediately after the marriage was decided upon. For, after all, he really knew nothing, or as good as

nothing, of Mr. Adair's position : and the proud Bohun blood bubbled up a little, as a thought crossed him that it was just possible he might find too late that, in point of family, hers was not fit to have been mated with his.

The human heart is very treacherous ; given over to self-deceit, and to much sophistry. So long as a thing is coveted, when it seems next door to unattainable, we see nothing but the desirability of gaining it, the advantages and happiness it must bring. But, let this great desire be attained, and lo ! we veer round with a vengeance, and repent our haste. For instantly every reason and argument that could bear against it, true or false, rise up within us with mocking force, and we say, Oh that I had waited before doing this thing ! It is that deceitful heart of ours that is in fault, nothing else ; placing upon all things its own false colouring.

At first, as they sat together under cover of the rocks, or on the more open benches on the sands, or wandered to the walks inland and the pretty rural lanes, his conversation would turn on Mr. Adair. But Ellen seemed to know as little of her father as he did.



"It is strange you don't remember more of him, Ellen!" he suddenly said on one occasion when he was alone with her at Mrs. Cumberland's.

"Strange! Do you think so?" returned Ellen, turning round from the bay window where she was standing. "I was sent to Europe at eight years old, and children of that age so soon forget. I seem to recollect a gentleman in some kind of white coat, who cried over me and kissed me, and said mamma was gone to live in heaven. His face was a pleasant one, and he had bright hair; something the colour of yours."

She thought Arthur had alluded to personal remembrance. But he had not meant that.

"I remember another thing—that papa used to say I was just like my mother, and should grow up like her," resumed Ellen. "It seems ages ago. Perhaps when I see him I shall find that my memory has been giving me an ideal father; that he is quite different from what I have pictured."

"You know none of your Scotch relatives, Ellen?"

"None."

"Or in what locality they live?"


"No."

"Why does not Mr. Adair come home?"

"I don't know. He has been thinking of it for some years; and that's why he put me with Mrs. Cumberland instead of having me sent out to him. I am sure he must respect Mrs. Cumberland very much," added Ellen after a pause. "His letters prove it. And he often mentions her late husband as his dear friend and chaplain. I'll show you some of the letters if you like. Would you? I keep all papa's letters."

Arthur Bohun's face lighted up at the proposition. "Yes," he said with animation. "Yes. As many as you please."

She crossed the room to unlock her desk, took out three or four letters indiscriminately from a bundle lying there, and brought them to him. He detained the pretty hands as well as the letters, and took some impassioned kisses from the blushing face, turned up unconsciously to his. Sweeter kisses than Arthur Bohun would ever impress upon any other face in after life. Ellen had almost learned not to shrink from them in her maiden



modesty: he vowed to her that it was now his best right and privilege.

But the letters told him nothing. They were evidently a gentleman's letters; but of the writer's position or family they said not a word. Arthur returned them with a half sigh: it was of no use, he thought, to disturb himself any more about the matter. After all, his own father and Mr. Adair had been close friends in India, and that was a kind of guarantee that all must be right. This decided, he delivered himself up to his ideal happiness: and the day of the wedding was finally fixed.

This afternoon, when they were pacing the beach, unseeing the little clouds rising in the west, was the marriage eve. It is the last day they need thus walk together as mere formal acquaintances, not daring to touch each other's hands in view of the public gaze, or to walk arm within arm: for at that little church whose spire is not a stone's-throw off, they will to-morrow be made man and wife. A strange light of happiness sits on Arthur Bohun's cheek, a stranger still is ever fluttering at his heart. The day and the hour are drawing very near to its realization: and not so much

as a thought has crossed his mind that any untoward fate could arise to mar it.

Ah, but might not those dark clouds have read him a lesson? Just as the black trifling circlets out there might rise into an overwhelming storm, before which both man and beast must bow their heads, so might be rising, even then, some unseen threatening wave in the drama of his life. And it was so: though he suspected it not. Even now, as they walked, the clouds were growing bigger: just as was the unseen thunder-storm that would descend upon their lives and hearts. Suddenly, in turning to face the west, Arthur saw them. They were pretty big now.

"Look at those clouds, getting up! I hope the weather's not going to change for us to-morrow, Ellen. What does that mean?" he asked of a man who was doing something to his small boat, now high and dry upon the beach.

The sailor glanced indifferently to where the finger pointed. "It means a storm, master."

"Shall we get it here, do you think?"

"Ay. Not till to-morrow, may be. I fancy we shall, though"—turning up his nose

and seeming to sniff around, as if the storm were pervading the air. "I knowed there was going to be a change."

"How did you know it?"

"Us fishermen smells a storm afore it comes, master. My foot tells it me besides. I got him jammed once, and he have had the weather in him ever since."

"And you think it's going to be a change altogether?"

"Ay that it be, master."

They walked on. "That will be two untoward events for us," remarked Captain Bohun; but he spoke with a jesting smile, as if no untoward events could mar their security of happiness. "We want a third to complete it, don't we, Ellen?"

"What are the two?"

"This threatened bad weather for to-morrow's one; Dick's non-coming is the other. I am vexed at that."

For, on this same morning, Mrs. Cumberland had received a letter from her son. Amidst other items of news, Dr. Rane mentioned that Richard North was absent; it was supposed in Belgium, but nobody knew for certain. This explained Richard's silence to

Captain Bohun, and put out the hope that Richard would be at the wedding. Dr. Rane also said another thing—which was anything but pleasant news: that beyond all doubt fever was breaking out at Dallory, though it was not yet publicly known. The doctor added that he feared it would prove to be of a malignant type, and he felt glad his mother was away. Bessy was well, and sent her love.

“Will you rest a little before going in?”

They were passing the favourite old seat under the rocks, as Captain Bohun asked it. Ellen acquiesced, and they sat down. The black clouds came higher and higher: but, absorbed in their own plans, in their own happiness, had the heavens become altogether overshadowed it would have been to them as nothing. In a low voice they conversed together of the future; beginning with the morrow, ending they knew not where. Their visions were of the sweetest rose-colour; they fully believed that bliss so great as their own had never been realized on earth. His arm was round Ellen as they sat, her hand lay in his, she could feel his warm breath on her cheek, her shoulder seemed to be resting against his heart. To all

intents and purposes they seemed as entirely alone in this sheltered nook as they could have been in the wilds of the desert. The beach was shingly; footsteps could not approach without being heard: had anybody passed, they would have been seen sitting with as decorous a space between them as though they had quarrelled: but the shore seemed deserted this afternoon.

The arrangement for the marriage was as follows:—At half-past eleven o'clock, Arthur, Ellen, and Mrs. Cumberland would enter the little church by a private door, and the ceremony would take place. Richard North was to have been deputed to give her away, but that was over now. Arthur had the licence; he had made a friend of the clergyman, and all would be done quietly. He and Ellen were to go away for a few days; she would then return to her home with Mrs. Cumberland, and be to the world still as Miss Adair. After that, Arthur would take his own time, and be guided by circumstances for declaring the marriage: but he meant, if possible, to at once introduce Ellen to his aunt, Miss Bohun. And Ellen Adair? Not a scruple rested on her mind, not a doubt or hesitation on her

heart : her father had given his cordial approbation—as expressed in the letter to Mrs. Cumberland—and she was full of the sweetest peace.

“Did you feel that, Ellen?”

It was a faint, quivering breeze that seemed to pass over them with sharp quickness and to be dying away in a moan. Some white sails out at sea flapped a little, and the boats turned homewards.

“We had better be going, too, my love ; or we may have it upon us.”

She rose as he spoke, and they walked homewards. The sky was getting darker ; the shades of evening were beginning to gather. Mrs. Cumberland had been lying down and was dressing, the maid said—if Captain Bohun would wait. Ellen took off her bonnet and mantle.

“While we are alone, let me see that I have not made a mistake in the size, Ellen.”

Taking from his pocket a bit of tissue paper, he unfolded it and disclosed a wedding-ring. Ellen turned the colour of fifteen peonies as he tried it on.

“I—thought,” she timidly began amidst her blushes, “that you meant this to be my



wedding-ring"—indicating the plain gold one she habitually wore on her right hand.

"No. Rane bought that one. This will be mine."

It was an exact fit. Captain Bohun had not allowed for the probability of those fragile fingers getting larger with years. As he held it on for a minute, their eyes met. Ellen suddenly recalled that long-past day in Dallory church, when she had taken Maria Warne's ring to serve for Bessy North, with the scene in the carriage afterwards, when Arthur Bohun put the other one on, and his sweet words: she recalled the scene in the garden when he put it on again. This was time the third.

"If this should ever get too small for me?" she murmured as he took it off the finger.

"Oh, but that—if ever—won't be for ages and ages."

Not for ages, and ages! If they, in their innocent unconsciousness, could but have seen the cruel Fate that was already coiling its meshes around them!

The storm did not come that night. But, whether, in aggravation for the delay, it chose to expend itself with double violence, certain

it was that such a one had seldom been seen at Eastsea as raged in the morning. The sky was lurid, angry, and black; the sea tossed itself; the wind howled; the rain came dashing down at intervals as if from so many buckets: all nature seemed at warfare.

In much distress lay Mrs. Cumberland. Exceedingly subject of late to outer influences, whether it might be this unusual storm that made her ill, she knew not, but she felt unable to rise from her bed. The hour for the marriage was drawing on. It had been fixed for a late one: half-past eleven. The clergyman had a funeral at half-past ten; and Mrs. Cumberland had said *she* could not be up and ready before that. At a little after eleven Arthur Bohun came up in the fly that was to convey them to church. Mrs. Cumberland sent to ask him to go up stairs to her; and he found her in tears. A curious sight: she was so self-contained a woman.

"I cannot help it, Captain Bohun: indeed I cannot. Had not the marriage better be put off for a day? I may be better to-morrow."

"Certainly not," he answered. "Why should it? I am very sorry for Ellen's sake;

she would have felt more comfortable at your being in church. But your presence is not essential to the ceremony, Mrs. Cumberland."

"Her father and mother were my dear friends. It seems as though I should fail in my duty if I were to allow her to go to church without me."

Arthur Bohun laughed. He would not hear a word—was it likely that he would? In less than an hour's time all responsibility in regard to Ellen would be transferred to him, he answered, for he should be her husband.

"The marriage will stand good, believe me, dear Mrs. Cumberland, though you do not witness it," were his last words as he went down stairs.

Ellen was ready. She wore an ordinary silk dress of light quiet colour, and a plain white bonnet: such as she might have walked out in at Eastsea. There was nothing, save her pale face and quivering lips, to denote that she was a bride. To have to go to church alone was very unpalatable, and she could with difficulty suppress her tears.

"My dearest love, I am more grieved at it for your sake than you can be," he whispered.

"Take a little courage, Ellen ; it will soon be over. Once you are my wife, I will strive to shelter you from all vexation."

But this illness of Mrs. Cumberland's made a hitch in the programme. For Arthur Bohun to go out with Mrs. Cumberland and Ellen in a fly, was nothing ; he sometimes accompanied them in their drives : but to go out alone with Ellen, and in that storm, would have excited the curiosity of Ann and the other servants. Arthur Bohun rapidly decided to walk to church, braving the rain : Ellen must follow in the fly. There was no time to be lost. It was twenty minutes past eleven.

"Shall I put you in the carriage first, Ellen ?" he stayed to ask.

"No. I think you had better not."

"My darling, you *will* come ?"

Did a doubt cross him, that he should say this ? But she answered that she would : he saw she spoke sincerely. He wrung her hand and went out to the door.

Had the fly multiplied itself into two flies ? —and were they squabbling for precedence ? Certainly two were there : and the one wet driver was abusing the other wet driver for

holding his place close before the door, and not allowing him to draw up to it.

“Arthur! Good Heavens, how fortunate I am! Arthur Bohun! don’t you see me?”

Every drop of blood in Arthur Bohun’s veins seemed to stand still and turn to ice, as he recognized his mother’s voice and his mother’s face. Madam, driven hastily from the railway station, had come to bear him off in the body. That his wedding was over for that day, instinct told him: she would have gone and forbidden the banns. He stepped to her fly door.

In after-life, he never could recall clearly these next few minutes. Madam spoke of the telegram that had been received at Dal-lory. She said—giving to matters her own colouring—that James Bohun was in extremity; that he only waited to see Arthur to die; that he was crying out for him: not a moment was to be lost. She had hastened to London on receipt of the telegram, and had now come down this morning straight to fetch him.

“Step in, Arthur. We must catch the quarter-to-twelve train.”

“I—I cannot go,” he answered.

"Not go !" screamed Madam. "But I command you to go. Would you disobey the last sacred wishes of a dying man ?"

Well, no ; he felt that he could not do that. "A quarter to twelve ?" he said rather dreamily. "You must wait, Madam, while I speak to Mrs. Cumberland. There's plenty of time."

He went indoors with his tale, and up to Mrs. Cumberland, like one in a dream. He was forced to go, he bewailed, but not for more than a day, when he should be back to complete the marriage. What could she answer ? In her bewilderment she scarcely understood what had happened or what had not. Leaping downstairs again, he closed the door of the sitting-room upon himself and Ellen, and clasped her to his heart.

"My darling ! But for this, you would have been on your way to become my wife. Come what may, Ellen, I shall be down again within a few hours. God bless you, my love ! Take care of these."

They were the ring and licence ; he handed them to her lest he might lose them. Before Ellen could recover herself, while yet her face was glowing with his farewell kisses, he was

being rattled away in the fly with Madam to the station.

Crafty Madam ! Waiting there in the fly at the door and making her observations, she had read what the signs meant almost as surely as though it had been told to her. The other fly waiting, and Ellen dressed ; going out in it on that day of storm ; Arthur out of mourning, and his nice attire covered over with a light over-coat—she guessed the truth (aided by the mysterious hint in the letter she had rifled) and believed full surely that it was nothing less than MARRIAGE she had interrupted. Not a word said she on the road to the station. The getting him away was a great victory gained : it would not do to risk the marring of it. But when they were in the train, and the whistle had sounded, and they were fairly off, then Madam spoke. They had the compartment to themselves.

“ Arthur, you cannot deceive me ; any attempt at it would be useless. You were about to marry Ellen Adair.”

She spoke quietly, almost affectionately ; when the bosom is beating with a horrible dread, calmness of manner obtains, more than

passion. For a single moment there wavered in Arthur Bohun's mind a doubt of whether it should be avowal or evasion, but not for longer. As it had come to this, why he must take his standing. He raised his head proudly.

"Right, mother. I am going to wed Ellen Adair."

Madam's pulses began to beat nineteen to the dozen: Her head grew hot, her hands grew cold.

"You *were*, you mean, Arthur."

"Yes. Put it as you like. What was interrupted to-day, will be concluded to-morrow. As soon as I have seen James, I shall return to Eastsea."

"Arthur! Arthur Bohun! It must never be concluded. Never."

"Pardon me, mother. I am my own master."

"A Bohun may not wed shame and disgrace."

"Shame and disgrace cannot attach to *her*. Madam, I must beg you to remember that in a few hours that young lady will be my wife. Do not try my temper too sorely."

"No, not to her, but to her father," panted



Madam—and Arthur felt frightened, he knew not why, at her strong emotion. “Would you wed the daughter of a—a—”

Madam paused. Arthur looked at her; his compressed lips trembled just a little.

“Of a what, mother? Pray go on.”

“Of everything that is bad. A forger. A convict.”

There was a dead pause. Nothing to be heard but the whirling train. “A—what?” gasped Captain Bohun, when he could get his breath.

“A CONVICT,” burst forth Madam in a scream; for her agitation was becoming irrepressible. “Why do you make me repeat painful things?”

“Mother! Of whom do you speak?”

“Of her father: William Adair.”

He fell back in the carriage like one who is shot. As one from whom life and all that can make it sweet, has suddenly gone out for ever.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A PANIC.

THE funerals were going about in Dallory. Dr. Rane's prognostications had proved correct; the fever was a real fever. It spread, and a panic set in.

As yet it had been confined to the poor. To those who for some months now had been living in squalor and despair and poverty. Some called it the famine fever; some a relapsing fever; some typhus: but, whatever the name accorded to it, one thing was certain—that it was of a malignant and fatal type.

It possessed a rather singular feature: that it seemed to burst out all at once—in a single night. Before the doctors had well made themselves sure that anything of the kind was in the air, before most of the public had so much as heard of it, it came. The probability of course was that it had been for

some days smouldering. On the afternoon that witnessed Madam's departure from Dallory Hall (after the receipt of the telegram and the reading of Dick's letter) there had not been one decided case: in the morning no less than seven cases had shown themselves. After that, it spread rapidly.

Madam remained away. James Bohun was dead, and she stayed with Sir Nash. Matilda North, taking French leave, went up there to join her without an invitation: she did not care to stay amidst the sickness. So the master of Dallory Hall was alone, and enjoyed his liberty as much as trouble had left him capable of.

A week or ten days had passed on now since the outbreak, and the funerals were going about Dallory. The two medical men, Dr. Rane and Mr. Seeley, were worked nearly off their legs. The panic that had set in was at its height. Dallory had been an exceptionally healthy place: people were unused to this state of things, and got frightened. Some of the better families took flight; for the sea-side, or elsewhere. The long-continued distress, resulting on the strike, had predisposed the poorer classes for it. It was they

whom it chiefly attacked, but there were now two or three cases amid their betters. This was no time for the medical men to speculate whether they should or should not be paid ; they put all such considerations aside, and gave the poor sufferers their best care. Dr. Rane in particular was tenderly assiduous with his patients. In spite of that fatal letter and the mistake—nay, the sin—it involved, he was a humane-natured man. Were he a successful practitioner, making his hundreds a year, or his thousands, as might be, he would be one of the first and readiest to give away largely of his time and skill to any who could not well afford to pay him.

The last person whom the fever had attacked was one of the brothers Hepburn of Dallory, undertakers, carpenters, and coffin-makers. Both of them were sickly men ; but exceedingly steady and respectable. The younger brother, Henry, was the one seized : it was universally assumed that he caught it in the discharge of certain of the duties of his calling, and the supposition did not tend to decrease the public panic. Dr. Rane thought him a bad subject for the illness, and did all he could.

Bessy Rane stood in her kitchen, making an apple pudding. It is rather a sudden transition of subject, from sickness to puddings, but only in accordance with existing life. Whatever calamity may be decimating society abroad, the domestic routine of daily existence goes on at home in just its ordinary course. Molly Green was pudding-maker in general ; but Molly was hastening over her other work that day, for she had obtained leave to go home in the evening to see her mother : a woman who had been ailing for years with chronic sickness, and lived at Whitborough. So Bessy this morning took upon herself the pudding.

Mrs. Rane stood at the table ; a brown holland apron tied over her light morning gown, her sleeves turned up to the middle of her arms above her wrists. Hands and wrists and arms were alike pretty. The apples lay in a basin ready pared, and she was rolling out the crust. Ever and anon she glanced at the kitchen clock. Her husband had been called out at early morning, four o'clock, and she was getting a little anxious. Now it was close upon eleven. It cannot be said that Bessy was afraid of the fever for him : she

shared in the popular belief that medical men are generally exempt from infection ; but she was always glad to see him come home safe and well.

His latch-key was heard in the door while she was thinking of him. Dr. Rane went straight up-stairs to the unused top-room, changed his clothes, and washed his hands and face—a precaution he always took when he had been with fever patients. Bessy put the kitchen door open, that he might see where she was when he came down.

“Pudding-making, Bessy!” he cried, looking in. “Why don’t you let Molly do that?”

“Molly’s busy. She wants to go home this evening, Oliver, as soon as we can spare her, and not come back until to-morrow night. She had a letter this morning to say her mother has at last taken to her bed, and the doctor thinks her very ill. I have given her leave to go.”

“But how shall you manage without her?”

“I shall have old Phillis in. Molly has been to her, and she says she’ll be glad to come.”

Dr. Rane said no more. It was quite the same to him whether Molly, or Phillis, did

what was wanted. When men are much harassed in spirit, they cannot concern themselves with petty details.

"I was thinking, Oliver, that—if you don't mind—as we can have Phillis, I would leave it to Molly whether to come back to-morrow night, or not. If her mother is really growing worse, the girl may like to stay a day longer with her."

"My dear, do just as you like about it," was the doctor's rather impatient answer.

"Your breakfast shall be ready in a moment, Oliver."

"I have taken breakfast. It was between eight and nine before I could get away from Ketlar's, and I went and begged some of Mrs. Gass. After that, I went round to the patients."

Bessy was putting the crust into the basin. She lifted her hands and turned in some dismay.

"Surely, Oliver, they have not got the fever at Ketlar's!"

Dr. Rane slightly laughed. "Not the fever, Bessy : something else. The baby. It was Ketlar who called me up this morning."

"Oh dear," said Bessy, going on with her

pudding. "I thought that poor baby was not expected for a month or two. How will they manage to keep it? It seems to me that the less food there is for them, the quicker the babies come."

"That's generally the case," observed Dr. Rane.

"Is the mother well?"

"Tolerably so."

"And—how are other things going on, Oliver?"

He knew, by the tone of her voice, that she meant the fever. Bessy never spoke of that without a kind of timidity.

"Neither worse nor better. It's very bad still."

"And fatal?"

"Yes, and fatal. Henry Hepburn is in danger."

"But he'll get over it?" rejoined Bessy quickly.

"I don't think so. His brother will have it next if he does not mind. He is as nervous over it as he can be. I am off now, Bessy, up the Ham."

"You will be in to dinner?"

"Before that, I hope."



Bessy settled to her pudding again, and the doctor departed. Not into danger this time, for the fever had not yet shown itself in Dallory Ham. Scarcely a minute had elapsed when the door-bell rang, and Molly went to answer it. Mrs. Rane, her hands all flour, peeped from the kitchen, and saw Mr. North.

"Oh papa! How glad I am to see you! Do you mind coming in here?"

Mind! Mr. North felt far more at home in Bessy's kitchen than in his wife's grand drawing-room. He had brought a small open basket of most lovely hot-house flowers for Bessy. He put it on the table, and sat down on one of the wooden chairs in peace and comfort. Richard had not returned, and he was still alone.

"Go on with your pudding, my dear. Don't mind me. I like to see it."

"It's all but done, papa. Molly will tie it up. Oh, these beautiful flowers!" she added, bending her face down to them. "How kind of you to think of me!"

"I'm going up to Ham Court about some seeds, child; the walk will do me good, this nice day. I feel stronger and better, Bessy, than I did."

"I am so glad of that, papa."

"And so I thought—as I was intending to call in here—that I'd cut a few blossoms, and bring with me. How's the fever getting on, Bessy?"

"It is not any better, I am afraid, papa."

"So I hear. They say that Henry Hepburn's dying."

Bessy felt startled. "Oh, I trust not! Though I think—I fear—Oliver has not very much hope of him."

"Well, I've heard it. And I came here, Bessy, to ask if you would not like to come to the Hall for a week or two. It might be safer for you. Are you at all afraid of catching it, child?"

"N—o," answered Bessy. But it was spoken dubiously, and Mr. North looked at her.

"Your husband has to be amongst it pretty well every hour of his life, and I can but think there must be some risk for you. You had better come to the Hall."

"Oliver is very particular to change his clothes when he comes in; but still I know there must of course be some little risk," she said. "I try to be quite brave, and not think

of it, papa : and I have a great piece of camphor inside here"—touching the bosom of her dress—" at which Oliver laughs."

" Which is as good as confessing that you are nervous about it, Bessy," said Mr. North.

" Not much, papa. A doctor's wife, you know, must not have fancies."

" Well, you come up to the Hall to-day, Bessy. It will be a change for you, and pleasant for me, now I'm all alone ; it'll be like some of the old days come back again, you and me together. As to Oliver, I dare say he'll be glad to have the house to himself a bit, while he is so busy."

Bessy, wiping the flour off her hands on a towel, consented. In point of fact, her husband had proposed, some days back, that she should go away : and she did feel half afraid of taking the fever through him.

" But it cannot be until to-morrow, papa," she said, as Mr. North rose to depart, and she accompanied him to the door, explaining that Molly was going home. " I should not like to leave Oliver alone in the house for the night. Phillis will be here to-morrow : she can stay and sleep, should Molly Green not return."

"Very well," said Mr. North.

It was left at this. Bessy opened the door for her father, and watched him on his way up the Ham.

Dr. Rane came back to dinner ; and found his patients allowed him an hour's peace to eat it in. Bessy informed him of the arrangement she had made : and that he was to be a bachelor from the morrow for an indefinite period. The doctor laughed, making a jest of it : but nevertheless he glanced keenly from under his eyelids at his wife.

"Bessy ! I do believe you are afraid !"

"No, not exactly," was her answer : "I don't think 'afraid' is the right word. It is just this, Oliver : I do not get nervous over it ; but I cannot help remembering rather often that you may bring it home to me."

"Then, my dear, go—go by all means where you will be out of harm's way, so far as I am concerned."

Dinner over, Dr. Rane hastened out again, on his way to see Mrs. Ketlar. He had just reached that bench in the shady part of the road at the neck of the Ham, when he saw Jelly coming along. The doctor only wished there was some convenient shelter to dart

into, by which he might avoid her. Ever since the night when he had heard that agreeable conversation as he sat under the cedar-tree, Jelly's keen green eyes had been worse to him than poison. She stopped when she met him.

"So that child of Susan Ketlar's is come, sir!"

"Ay," said Dr. Rane.

"What in the world brings it here now?"

"Well, I don't know," returned the doctor.

"Children often come without giving their friends due notice. I am on my way thither."

"And not as much as a bedgown to wrap it in," resentfully went on Jelly, "and not a bit o' tea or oatmeal in the place for her! My faith! baby after baby coming into the world all round, and the men out on strike! This makes seven—if they'd all been alive; she'll be contented perhaps when she's got seventeen."

"It is the way of the world, Jelly. Set-up the children first, and consider what to do with them afterwards."

"What's this that's the matter with Tim Wilks, sir?" demanded Jelly, abruptly changing the subject.

"With Tim Wilks ! I did not know that anything was the matter with him."

"Yes, there is," said Jelly. "I met old Green just now, and he said Timothy Wilks was in bed, ill. They thought it might be a bilious attack, if it was not the fever."

"I'll call in and see him," said Dr. Rane. "Has he been drinking again?"

Jelly's eyes flashed with resentment. Considering that Tim had really kept sober and steady for the past year and half, she looked on the question as a frightful aspersion. And the more especially so as proceeding from Dr. Rane.

"*I* can answer for it that he has not been drinking—and so, as I supposed, might everybody else," was her tart reply. "Timothy Wilks is worried, sir : that's what it is. He has never been at ease since people accused him of writing that anonymous letter : and he never will be till he is publicly cleared of it. Sir, I think he ought to be."

Was it an ice-bolt that seemed to shoot through Oliver Rane's heart?—or only a spasm? Something took it : though he managed to keep his countenance, and to speak with calm indifference.

"Cleared? Cleared of what? I fancied it had been ascertained that Wilks was the man who spoke of the affair out of Dale's office. He can't clear himself from that. As to any other suspicion, no one has cast it on him."

"Well, sir—of course *you know best*," answered Jelly, recollecting herself and cooling down: but she could not help giving the words an emphasis. "If Tim should become dangerously ill, it might have to be done to set his mind at rest."

"What might have to be done?" demanded Dr. Rane with authority.

And Jelly did not dare to answer the direct question. She could boast and talk *at* people in her gossiping way so long as she felt safe, but when it came to anything like proving her words, she was a very coward. Dr. Rane was looking at her, waiting for her to speak, his manner uncompromising, his countenance stern.

"Oh well, sir, I'm sure I don't know at all," she said, her tongue feeling as if it had dried up. "And I'm sure I hope poor Tim has not got the fever."

"I'll call and see him," repeated Dr. Rane,

proceeding on his way. Jelly curtsied and went on hers.

When beyond her view, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, damp as with the dews of death. He must, he *must* get away from Jelly and Dallory! But for having a wife on his hands, he might have felt tempted to make a hasty flitting to America and join Dr. Jones. Join Dr. Jones? —But where was the wherewithal to do it? He had it not. His thoughts turned, as they ever did on these occasions, to that money of his locked up in the Tontine. *Of his*: that was how Dr. Rane had got to regard it. That money would bring him salvation. If he could but obtain it——

A bow from some white-haired old gentleman, passing in a carriage. Dr. Rane returned it, the singular coincidence of his appearance at that moment flashing through his mind. For it was Sir Thomas Ticknell. Yes: it truly seemed to him that that Tontine money would be nothing less than salvation. He went on with a great fear and pain in his throbbing heart, wondering for how long or short a time Jelly would hold her counsel.



The next morning was Thursday. It brought news that nearly struck people dumb: Henry Hepburn, the undertaker, was dead, and Mrs. Rane had been seized with the fever. Dr. Rane's account was, that his wife had been very restless all night; he gave her a composing draught, which seemed to do good for the time; but upon attempting to get up she was attacked with nausea and faintness, and had to go back to bed. The symptoms that subsequently set in he feared were those of the fever.

It was an awkward time for Bessy to be ill, as Molly Green had gone home: but Phillis, an excellent substitute, was there. She attended on Mrs. Rane, and the doctor went abroad to his patients. Mr. North, disappointed at Bessy's non-arrival, hearing of her indisposition, came to the house; but Bessy sent down an urgent message by Phillis, begging him not to run into any danger by coming up to her chamber. And Mr. North, docile and obedient—as Madam in her imperiousness had trained him to be—left his best love, and went back home again.

In the course of the morning Dr. Rane called in at Hepburn's. It was a kind of

double shop and double house; in the one were sold articles of furniture, in the other the carpenter's work was carried on. Thomas Hepburn and his family lived in the first; Henry, now dead, had occupied the last. He was a married man, but had no children. When Dr. Rane entered the second shop, he did not at first see Thomas Hepburn; the two shutters up at the window made the place dark, after coming in from the bright sunshine. Thomas Hepburn saw him, however, and came forward from the workshop behind, where he had been looking on at his men. Various articles seemed to be in the course of active construction, coffins amidst the rest.

"I am very sorry for this loss, Hepburn," began the doctor.

"Well, sir, I've not had any hope from the first," sighed Hepburn, his face looking careworn and unusually sickly in the semi-light. "I don't think poor Henry had."

"The fact is, Hepburn, he had not strength to carry him through the disorder; it did not attack him lightly. I did all I could."

"Yes, sir, I'm sure of that," returned Hepburn—and what with his naturally weak voice,

and the hammering that was going on behind, Dr. Rane had to listen with all his ears to catch the words. "We've been an ailing family always: liable to take disorders, too, more than others."

Dr. Rane made no reply for the moment. He was regarding the speaker. Something in his aspect imparted the suspicion that the man was in actual present fear.

"You must keep up a good heart, you know, Hepburn."

"I'd rather go a hundred miles, sir, than do what I've got to do just now amid the dead," said Hepburn, glancing round. "*That's* how my brother took it."

"Let a workman go instead of you."

The undertaker shook his head. "One *has* to go with me; and the other is just as afraid as afraid can be. No, I must go on myself. There'll be double work for me, now Henry's gone."

"Well, Hepburn, I begin to think the fever is on the turn," said the doctor, cheerily, as he walked away.

The day wore on. Mrs. Rane's symptoms were decidedly those of fever, and the doctor went all the way to Whitborough himself

(not far in actual distance, only that he could not well spare the time) to tell Molly Green she was to keep where she was, out of harm's way, and not return until sent for. When he got back home, his wife was worse. Phillis met him at the door, and said her poor mistress's face was scarlet, and she rolled her head from side to side. Phillis wanted to stay the night, but the doctor would not have it: there was no necessity, he said, and she had better not be longer in the infection than could be helped. So Phillis went away at ten o'clock.

Between eleven and twelve, just as Mr. Seeley was preparing for rest, Dr. Rane came in and asked him to go over to see his wife. The surgeon went at once. Bessy was lying in bed in her comfortable chamber, just as Phillis had described—her face scarlet, her head turning uneasily on the pillow. A candle stood on the table, dimly lighting the room; Mr. Seeley took it close to inspect her face; but Bessy put up her hand and turned her head away, as if the light hurt her.

"She seems slightly delirious," whispered Mr. Seeley apart, and Dr. Rane nodded. After that, the two doctors talked together a

little on the stairs, and Mr. Seeley went away, saying he would come again in the morning.

In the morning, however, Dr. Rane went over to tell him that his wife, after a most restless night, had dropped into a quiet doze, and had better not be disturbed. He felt sure she was better. This was Friday.

Phillis arrived betimes. She found a wet sheet flapping in the gray ante-room, just outside the bed-chamber door, which Dr. Rane had saturated with disinfecting liquid. Jars of disinfectants stood on the wide landing, on the staircase, and in other parts of the house. Phillis had no fear, and went in behind the flapping sheet. She could make nothing of Mrs. Rane. Instead of the scarlet face and restless head, she now lay buried in her pillow, still, and pale, and intensely quiet. Phillis offered her some tea; Mrs. Rane just opened her eyes, and feebly motioned it away with her hand, just as she had motioned away the light the previous night. "It's a sudden change," thought Phillis. "I don't like it."

Later in the morning, Dr. Rane brought up Mr. Seeley. She lay in exactly the same position, deep in the pillow. What with that,

and what with the large night-cap, the surgeon could get to see very little of her face.

"Don't disturb me," she faintly said, when he would have aroused her sufficiently to get a good look. "I am easy now."

"Do you know me?" questioned Mr. Seeley, bending over her.

"Yes," she answered, opening her eyes for a moment. "Let me sleep; I shall be better to-morrow."

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Only tired. Let me sleep."

"Bessy," said her husband, in the persuasive voice he used to the sick, "won't you just turn to Mr. Seeley?"

"To-morrow. I want to go to sleep."

And so they did not disturb her further. After all, sleep does wonders, as Dr. Rane remarked.

It might have been that Mr. Seeley went away somewhat puzzled, scarcely thinking that the fever had been on her sufficiently long to leave this kind of exhaustion.

As the day grew older, a rumour was whispered that Mrs. Rane was dying. Whence it arose none could trace, unless from a word or two dropped by Dr. Rane himself to Thomas

Hepburn. They happened to meet in the street, and the undertaker stopped to inquire after Mrs. Rane. She was in a most critical state, was the doctor's answer: the night would decide it, one way or the other.

Phillis went up to her mistress several times. Dr. Rane kept the hanging sheet well saturated, and flapped it often. Mrs. Rane never seemed to rouse herself throughout the day: seemed, in fact, to sleep through it. Phillis began to hope that it was indeed comfortable, refreshing sleep, and that she would awake better.

"You'll let me stay here to-night, master?" she said, when there was nothing more to do, as Dr. Rane—who had been out—came in, and passed by the kitchen.

"No need," he answered in his decisive manner. "Be here the first thing in the morning."

Phillis put on her shawl and bonnet, wished him good-night, and departed. It was about ten o'clock. Dr. Rane saw her out and went up to the sick chamber. In less than five minutes he came down again with a white face, opened the front door, and strode across the road to Mr. Seeley's. The latter was in

his surgery, in the act of pouring out some medicine into a small phial.

"Seeley! Seeley! My wife is gone!"

What with the suddenness of the interruption, and what with the words, the surgeon was so startled that he dropped the bottle.

"Gone!" he cried. "Do you mean *dead*?"

"I do."

"Why, when I saw you at dusk, you told me she was sleeping comfortably!" said the surgeon, staring at Dr. Rane. "Phillis also said it."

"And so she was. She was to all appearance. Heaven is my witness that I thought and believed the sleep then to be natural—that it was refreshing her. She must have died in it. I went up now, and found her—found her—getting cold. She must have been dead more than an hour."

Oliver Rane put his arm on Mr. Seeley's counter and bent his face on them to hide his emotion. The surgeon, in the midst of his surprise, had hardly ever felt so sorry for any one as he felt in that moment for his brother practitioner.



## CHAPTER XII.

### WHAT JELLY SAW.

“**I**T was too true ; Mrs. Rane was dead,” said sympathising people one to the other ; for even that same night the sad tidings went partially out to Dallory. What with the death of Hepburn the undertaker, and now the doctor’s wife—both prominent people, so to say, in connection with the sickness—something like consternation fell on such as heard it. Dr. Rane carried the news himself to Dallory Hall, catching Mr. North just as he was going to bed, and imparting it to him in the most gentle and soothing manner he knew how. Fearing that if he left it until morning, it might reach him abruptly, the doctor thus made haste. From thence he went on to Hepburn’s. He had chanced to meet Francis Dallory in coming out of Seeley’s ; he met some one else he knew ; these imparted the

tidings to others : so that many heard of it that night.

But now we come to a very strange and singular thing that happened to Jelly. Jelly in her tart way was sufficiently good-hearted. There was sickness in Ketlar's house : the wife had her three days' old infant : the little girl, Cissy, got worse and weaker : and Jelly chose to sacrifice an afternoon to the nursing of them. Much as she disapproved of the man's joining the Trades' Union and upholding the strike, often as she had assured him that both starving and the workhouse, whichever he might prefer, were too good for him, now that misfortune lay upon the house, Jelly came to a little. Susan Ketlar was her cousin ; and, after all, *she* was not to blame for her husband's wrong doings. Accordingly, in the afternoon of the last day of Mrs. Rane's illness, Jelly went forth to Ketlar's, armed with some beef-tea, and a few scraps for the half-famished children, the whole enclosed in a reticule bag.

"I shall take the latch-key," she said, in starting, to the cook, who was commonly called Dinah, "so you can go to bed. If Susan Ketlar's very ill I'll stop late. Mind you put a box of matches on the slab in the hall."

Susan Ketlar was not very ill, Jelly found ; but the child, Cissy, was. So ill, that Jelly hardly knew whether to leave her at all, or not. The mother could not attend to her ; Ketlar had gone tramping off beyond Whitborough after Union work, and had not come back. Only that she thought Mrs. Cumberland would not be pleased if she came to hear that Jelly, the confidential servant left in charge, had stayed out for a night, leaving the house with only the cook in it, she, Jelly, had certainly stayed. At past twelve poor Ketlar got home, dead beat, sick, faint, having walked several miles without food. Jelly blew him up a little—she considered that the man who could refuse work when his children were starving, because he belonged to the Trades' Union, deserved nothing but blowing-up on any score—bade him look to Cissy, told him ungraciously that there was a loaf in the pan, and came away. Ketlar, fit to drop though he was, civilly offered to see her home ; but all the thanks he got in return, was a recommendation to attend to his own concerns and not to meddle with hers.

It was a fine, still night, rather too warm for the sickness that lay on Dallory ; and Jelly

walked on at a swift pace, her reticule, empty now, on her arm. Some women might have felt timid at the midnight walk : Jelly was too strong-minded. She certainly found it a little lonely on entering the Ham, as if the road under the overshadowing trees, beginning now to lose some of their leaves, had something weird about it. But this part was soon passed ; and Jelly came to the houses, and within sight of home. Not a soul met she : it was as dreary, as far as human companionship went, as could be. A black cat sprang suddenly from the hedge, and tore over the road almost across Jelly's feet ; and it made her start.

She began thinking about Mrs. Rane ; quite unconscious of the death that had taken place. When Jelly left home in the afternoon Mrs. Rane was said to be in danger : at least such was Phillis's opinion, privately communicated : but, late in the evening, news had been brought to Ketlar's that all danger was over ; that Mrs. Rane was in a refreshing sleep, and going on safely to recovery.

"And I'm downright glad of it, poor young lady !" said Jelly, half aloud, as she turned in at her gate. "Doctors' wives are naturally more exposed to the chance of catch-

ing infectious sickness. But on the other hand they have the best advice and care."

It was striking one. Letting herself in with the latch key, Jelly felt for the box of matches, passing her hand cautiously over the marble table. And passed it in vain: no matches were there.

"Forgetful hussy!" ejaculated Jelly, apostrophizing the unconscious Dinah. "Much good she's of!"

So Jelly crept quietly upstairs in the dark, knowing she had matches in her own chamber: and in a minute came upon another of the negligent Dinah's delinquencies. She had omitted to draw down the blind of the large window on the landing.

"She has been out at that back-door, talking to people," quoth Jelly in her wrath. "Just like her! Won't she get a taste of my tongue in the morning!"

Turning to draw down the blind herself, she was suddenly arrested, with the cord in her hand, by a sight in the opposite landing—Dr. Rane's. Standing there, dressed in something white, which Jelly at the time took for a night-gown or petticoat, was Mrs. Rane. The landing was faintly lighted, as if by some distant

candle, invisible to Jelly ; but Mrs. Rane was perfectly distinct, her features and even their expression quite clear. The first thought that crossed Jelly was, that Mrs. Rane was delirious : but she looked too still for that. She did not move ; and the eyes had a fixed stare, as it seemed to Jelly. But that she herself must have been invisible from the surrounding darkness, she would have thought Mrs. Rane was staring at *her*. For a full minute this lasted : Jelly watching, Mrs. Rane never stirring.

“ What in the world brings her standing there ? ” quoth Jelly in her amazement. “ And what can she be staring at ? It can’t be at me.”

But at that moment Jelly’s bag slipped off her arm, and fell on the carpet with a bang. It caused her to shift her gaze from the opposite landing for a single second—it really did not seem longer. When she looked again, the place was in darkness : Mrs. Rane and the faint light were alike gone.

“ She has no business to be out of her bed—and the doctor ought to tell her so if he’s at home,” thought Jelly. “ Any way, she must be a great deal better : for I don’t think it’s delirium.”

She waited a short while, but nothing more was seen. Drawing down the blind with a jerk, Jelly picked up her bag, and passed on to her own chamber—one of the back rooms on this first floor. Where she slept undisturbed until morning.

She lay late. Being amenable to nobody while Mrs. Cumberland was away, the house's mistress in fact, as well as Dinah's, Jelly did not hurry herself. She was no laggard in general, especially on a Saturday, but felt tired after her weary afternoon at Ketlar's and from having gone so late to rest. Breakfast was ready in the kitchen when she got down; Dinah—a red-faced young woman in a brown-spotted cotton gown—being busy at the fire with the coffee.

"Now then!" began Jelly—her favourite phrase when she was angry. "What have you got to say for yourself? Whereabouts on the slab did you put those matches last night?"

Dinah, taken-to, tilted the kettle back. Until that moment she had not thought of her negligence.

"I'm afraid I never put 'em at all," she said.

"No you *didn't* put 'em," retorted Jelly with stinging emphasis. "But for having

matches and a candle in my room, I must have undressed in the dark. And I'd like to know why you didn't put 'em ; and what you were about, not to ?"

"I'm sure I'm sorry," said Dinah, who was a tractable kind of girl. "I forgot it, I suppose, in the upset about poor Mrs. Rane."

"In the upset about poor Mrs. Rane," scornfully repeated Jelly. "What upset you, pray, about her ?—And you've never been out to fasten back the shutters !"

"She's dead," answered Dinah—and the ready tears came into the girl's eyes. "That's what I've got the shutters half-to for. I thought you'd most likely not have heard it."

A little confusion arose in Jelly's mind. Thought is quick. Mrs. Rane's death (as she supposed) could not possibly have occurred before morning : the neglect, as to the matches, was last night. But, in the shock of the news she passed this over. Her tart tone went away as by magic ; her face changed to an amazed sadness.

"Dead ? When did she die, Dinah ?"

"It was about nine o'clock last night, they think. And she lay an hour after that in her bed, Jelly, getting cold, before it was found out."



On hearing this, Jelly's first impression was that Dinah must be playing with her. The girl came from the fire with the coffee, wiping her eyes.

"Now what d'ye mean, girl? Mrs. Rane didn't die last night—as I can answer for."

"Oh but she did, Jelly. Dr. Rane went up to her at ten o'clock—he had been out till then—and found her dead. I can tell you, I didn't half like to go all the way up to bed by myself to that top floor, and me alone in the house, knowing she was lying there at the very next door."

Jelly waited to take in the full sense of the words, staring at Dinah while she did it. What *was* all this?

"You must have taken leave of your senses, girl," she said, as she began to pour out the coffee.

"I'm sure I've not," said Dinah. "Why?"

"To tell me Mrs. Rane died last night. How did you pick up the tale?"

"Jelly, it's no tale. It's as true as you and me's here. I was standing at the front gate for a breath of air, before shutting-up, when Dr. Rane came out of his house in a haste like, and went across to Mr. Seeley's. It struck me that Mrs. Rane might be worse and that

he had gone to fetch the other, so I stayed a bit to see. Presently—it wasn't long—he came back across the road again. Mr. Francis Dallory happened to be passing, and he asked after Mrs. Rane. She was dead, the doctor said; and went on to tell him how he had found her. You needn't look as if you thought I was making-up stories, Jelly. They stood close by the doctor's gate, and I heard every word."

Jelly did not precisely know how she looked. If this was true, why—what could be the meaning of that which she had seen in the night?

"She can't be dead?"

"She is," said Dinah. "Why should you dispute it?"

Jelly did not say why. She gulped down her hot coffee at a draught, and went out, eating a piece of bread-and-butter. She did not believe it. Dinah evidently did: but the girl might have caught up some misapprehension: or, as Jelly mentally put it, "heard cross-wise."

The first thing that struck Jelly when she got outside, was the appearance of the doctor's house. It was closely shut up, doors and

windows, and the blinds were down. As Jelly stood, looking up, she saw Mr. Seeley standing at his door without his hat. She went over and accosted him.

"Is it true, sir, that Mrs. Rane is dead?"

"Quite true," was the answer. "She died yesterday evening, poor lady. It was terribly sudden."

Jelly felt a very queer sensation take her. But she was in a fog of disbelief yet. Mr. Seeley was called to from within, and Jelly returned and knocked softly at Dr. Rane's door. Phillis opened it, her eyes swollen with crying.

"I say, Phillis, whatever is all this?" demanded Jelly, in a low tone. "When did she die?"

"Stop a bit," interposed Phillis, arresting her entrance. "You'd better not come in. I am not afraid: and, for the matter of that, somebody must be here: but it isn't well for those to run risks that needn't. The doctor says it was the quickest and most malignant case of them all."

"I never caught any disorder in my life, and I don't fear that I ever shall," answered Jelly, quietly making her way to the kitchen. "When did she die, Phillis?"

"About nine o'clock last evening, as is thought. The minute and hour won't never be known for sure : at ten, when the doctor found her, she was getting cold. And for us below to have thought her quietly sleeping !" wound up Phillis with a sob.

The queer sensation grew into tremor. Jelly had never experienced anything like it in her whole life. She stood against the dresser, staring at Phillis helplessly.

"I don't *think* she could have died last evening," whispered Jelly presently.

"And I'm sure I as little thought she was dying," returned Phillis. "The last time I went up was about half-after seven : she was asleep then ; that I'm positive of ; and it seemed a good healthy sleep, for the breathing was as regular as could be. Sometime after eight o'clock, master went up : he came down and said she was still sleeping, and he hoped she'd sleep till morning, and I'd better not go up again for fear of disturbing her. I didn't go up, Jelly. I knew if she woke and wanted anything she'd ring : the bell-rope was to her hand. Master went out to a patient, and I cleared up in the kitchen here. He came in at ten o'clock. I was ready to go, but asked

him if I should stay all night. There was no need, he answered, missis being better ; and I went. I never heard nothing more till I come this morning. The milkman got to the door just as I did ; and he began saying what a sad thing it was that she had died. ‘ Who had died,’ I asked him, and he said, ‘ Why, my missis.’ Jelly, you might have knocked me down with a breath of wind.”

By Jelly’s looks at this moment, it seemed as if a breath of wind might do the same for her. Her face and lips had turned of a yellow whiteness.

“ The master opened the door to me : and told me all about it : about his finding her dead close upon my going out,” continued Phillis. “ He’s frightfully cut up, poor man. Not that there’s any tears, but his face is heavy and sad, like one looks who has never been in bed all night—as he hasn’t been. I found a blanket on the dining-room sofa, so he must have lain down there.”

“ Where is he now ?” asked Jelly.

“ Out. He was fetched to somebody at Dallory. I must stir up the pots,” added Phillis, alluding to the earthen jars that were about with the disinfectants. “ Master

charged me to do it every hour. It's safer for the undertaker's men and others that have to come to the house."

Taking a piece of stick, she went into the hall, to wherever stood a jar, and gave the contents a good stir. The dining-room door was open: Dr. Rane's solitary breakfast was laid there, waiting for him. From thence, Phillis went up the staircase to the other jars. Jelly followed.

"Nasty stuff! I do hate the smell of it," muttered Phillis. "I'd not come up if I were you," she added to Jelly, in the low, hushed voice that we are all apt to use when near the dead.

Jelly disregarded the injunction. She believed herself safe: and was not prone to take advice at the best of times. "Whatever's that?" she exclaimed when she reached the landing.

The sheet that had been flapping for two days outside the bedroom door, now flapped, wet as ever, on the landing before the door of the ante-room. Dr. Rane deemed this the better place for it now. Phillis gave it some knocks with the stick to bring out its saving properties.

Compared to the gloom of the rest of the house, behind its drawn blinds, this landing, with its wide, staring, uncovered window, was strikingly bright. Jelly glanced around, it might have been thought nervously, only that she was not a nervous woman. Here, in the middle of the floor, at one o'clock in the morning, her face turned to that window, had stood Mrs. Rane. If not Mrs. Rane—who?—or what?

"Phillis," whispered Jelly, "I should like to see her."

"You can't," answered Phillis.

"Nonsense. I am not afraid."

"But you can't, Jelly. She is fastened down."

"She is!—Why what do you mean?" broke off Jelly.

Phillis took up a corner of the sheet, unlocked the door—in which the key was left—and opened it half an inch for Jelly to peep in. There, in the middle of the gray room stood a closed coffin, supported on trestles. In the shock of the surprise Jelly fell back against the wall, and began to tremble.

The idea that came over her—as she said to some one afterwards—was, that Mrs. Rane

had been put into the coffin alive. What with the sight of the previous night (and Jelly did not yet admit to herself the full thought of what that sight might have been), and what with this, she felt in a kind of bewildered horror. Recovering herself a little, she pushed past the sheet into the room, but with creeping, timid steps.

"Jelly, I'd not go in! The master charged me not."

But Jelly never heard. Or, if she heard, did not heed. It was a common deal shell: its lid nailed down. Jelly touched it with her fore-finger.

"*When* was she put in here, Phillis?"

"Sometime during the night."

"And fastened down at once?"

"To be sure. I found it like this when I came this morning."

"But—why need there have been such haste?"

"Because it was safest so. Safest for us that are living, as my master said. The leaden one will be here to-day."

Well—of course it was safer. Jelly could but acknowledge it, and recovered herself somewhat. She wished she had not seen—



that—in the night. It was that sight, so unaccountable, that was turning her mind upside down.

With her customary lack of ceremony, Jelly opened the bedroom door, and looked in. It had not been put to-rights : Phillis said her master would not let her go in to do anything to it until the two rooms should have been fumigated. Medicine bottles stood about ; the bed-clothes lay over the foot of the bed, just as Hepburn's men must have flung them when they removed the dead. On the dressing-table lay a bow of blue ribbon that poor Bessy had worn in her gown the last day she had one on, a waistband with its buckle, and other trifles. Jelly began to feel oppressed, as if her breath were getting short, and came away hastily. Phillis stood on the landing beyond the sheet.

“ It seems like a dream, Phillis.”

“ I wish we could awake and find it was one,” answered Phillis, practically, as she turned the key in the lock : and they went down stairs.

Not a minute too soon. Before they had well reached the kitchen, Dr. Rane's latch-key was heard.

"There's the master," cried Phillis under her breath, as he turned into his consulting-room. "It's a good thing he didn't find us up there."

"I want to say a word to him, Phillis; I think I'll go in," said Jelly, taking a sudden resolution to acquaint Dr. Rane with what she had seen. The truth was, her mind felt so unhinged, knowing not what to believe, what to disbelieve, that she thought she must speak, or die.

"Need you bother him now?—what's it about?" asked Phillis. "I'd let him get his breakfast first."

But Jelly went on to the consulting-room door: and found herself nearly knocked over by the doctor—who was turning swiftly out of it. She asked if she could speak to him: he said Yes, if she'd be quick; but he wanted to catch Mr. Seeley before the latter went out.

"And your breakfast, master?" called out Phillis in a pitying tone.

"I'll take some presently," was the answer. "What is it that you want, Jelly?"

Jelly carefully closed the door before speaking. She then entered on her tale. At first the doctor supposed, by this show of caution,

that she was going to consult him on some private ailment, St. Antony's fire in the face, for instance, or St. Vitus's dance in the legs ; and thought she might have chosen a more opportune time. But he soon found it was nothing of the kind. With her hands pressing heavily the elbow of the patient's chair, Jelly told her tale. The doctor stood facing her, his arms folded, his back to the drawn-down blind. At first he did not appear to understand.

"Saw my wife upon the landing in her nightgown?" he exclaimed,—and Jelly thought he looked startled. "Surely she was not so imprudent as to get out of bed and go there!"

"But, sir, it is said that she was then dead!"

"Dead when? She did not die until nine o'clock. She could not have known what she was doing," continued Dr. Rane, passing his hand over his forehead. "Perhaps she may have caught a chill. Perhaps——"

"You are misunderstanding me, sir," interrupted Jelly. "It was in the night I saw this; some hours after Mrs. Rane's death."

Dr. Rane's face took a puzzled expression. He looked narrowly at Jelly, as if wondering what it was she would say.

“Not *last* night?”

“Yes, sir. Or, I’d rather say this morning; for it was one o’clock. I saw her standing there as plainly as I see you at this moment.”

“Why, Jelly, you must have been dreaming?”

“I was as wide awake, sir, as I am now. I had just got home from Ketlar’s. I can’t think what it was I did see,” added Jelly, dropping her voice.

“You saw nothing,” was the decisive answer—and in the doctor’s tone there was some slight touch of anger. “Fancy plays tricks with the best of us: it must have played you one last night.”

“I have been thinking whether it was possible that—that—she was not really dead, sir,” persisted Jelly. “Whether she could have got up, and—”

“Be silent, Jelly. I cannot listen to this folly,” came the stern, checking interruption. “You have no right to let your imagination run away with you, and then talk of it as something real. I desire that you will never speak another word upon the subject to me; or to anyone.”

Jelly’s green eyes seemed to have borrowed

the doctor's look of puzzled doubt. She gazed into his face. This was a most curious business: she could not see as yet the faintest gleam of any solution to it.

"It was surely her I saw on the landing, sir, dead or alive. I could swear to it. Such things have been heard of before now as swoons being mistaken for death. When poor Mrs. Rane was left alone after her death—that is, her supposed death—if she revived; and got up; and came out upon the landing——"

"Hold your tongue," interposed the doctor, sharply. "How dare you persist in this nonsense, woman! You must be mad or dreaming. An hour before the time you speak of, my poor wife, dead and cold, was where she is now—fastened down in her shell."

He flung out of the room with an indignant movement; leaving Jelly speechless with horror.

"Fastened down," ran her thoughts, "at twelve o'clock—dead and cold—and I saw her on the landing at one! Oh my goodness, what does it mean?"

letter. Ellen watched the postman pass the house, and she turned sick and white. Mrs. Cumberland—who was better and had risen betimes, expecting Captain Bohun, and that the marriage would certainly take place that day—took the absence of letters with philosophy.

“He might as well have written a line, of course, Ellen; but it only shows that he is coming in by the first train. That will be due in twenty minutes.”

Ellen stood at the window, watching; her spirit faint, her heart beating. That vague under-current of uneasiness had grown into a great recognized fear now—but a fear she knew not of what. She made no pretence to eat breakfast; she could not have swallowed a morsel had it been to save her life: Mrs. Cumberland said nothing, except that she must take some after Captain Bohun had come.

“There’s the train, Ellen. I hear the whistle.”

The window had a dwarf Venetian blind; Ellen sat behind it, glancing through the staves. Three or four straggling passengers were at length perceived, making their way

down the street. But not one of them was Captain Bohun. The shock of disappointment was turning her heart to sickness, when a station fly came careering gaily up the street.

Ah me, how hope rose again ! She might have known he would take a fly, and not *walk* up. The driver seemed making for their house. Ellen's eyes grew bright ; her pale cheeks changed to rose-colour.

"Is that fly coming here, my dear?"

"I think so, Mrs. Cumberland."

"Then it's Captain Bohun. We must let the clergyman know at once, Ellen."

The fly stopped at their house, and Ellen hid her head ; she would not seem to be looking for him, though he was so soon to be her husband. But—something was called out to the driver in a shrill voice from the inside ; upon which he started his horse on again, and pulled up at the next door. A lady and child got out. It was *not* Captain Bohun.

I wonder whether disappointment so great ever fell on mortal woman ? Great emotions, be they of joy or sorrow, are always silent. The heart alone knoweth its own bitterness, says the wise King, and a stranger may not intermeddle with its joy. Ellen laid her

hands a minute or two on her bosom ; but never a word spoke she.

“ He’ll be here by the next train,” said Mrs. Cumberland. “ He *must* come, you know, Ellen.”

She watched throughout the livelong day. How its hours dragged themselves along she knew not. Imagination pictured all kinds of probabilities that might bring him at any minute. He might post down : he might alight by mistake at the wrong station, and walk on : he might have come by the last train in, and be putting himself to rights at the hotel after travelling. Five hundred such ideas, alternating with despair, presented themselves. And thus the weary day went on. Towards night the same delusive hope of the morning again rose ; the same farce, of the apparent arrival of Captain Bohun, was once more enacted.

It was dusk ; almost dark : for Ellen, watching ever, had not thought about lights ; and Mrs. Cumberland, tired with her long day, was gone into the small back dining-room to lie on the sofa undisturbed. The last train for the night was steaming in : Ellen heard the whistle. If it did not bring Captain



Bohun she thought she could only give him up for ever.

A short interval of suspense ; and then—surely he was coming ! A fly or two came rattling along the street from the station : and one of them—yes—one of them drew up at the door. Ellen, thinking she had learnt wisdom, said to herself that she would not get up any expectation in regard to this. Foolish girl ! when her whole heart was throbbing and beating.

One of the house servants had gone out, and was opening the fly door. A gentleman's hand pitched out a light over-coat ; a gentleman himself leaped out after it, and turned to get something from the seat. Tall and slender, Ellen took it to be Captain Bohun : the light coat was exactly like his.

And the terrible suspense was over ! She should now know what the mystery had been. He had written most likely, and the letter had miscarried : how stupid she was not to have thought of that before ! She heard his footsteps in the passage ; he was coming in : in another instant she should be in his arms, feeling his kisses on her lips. It was a moment's delirium of happiness : neither more

nor less. Ellen stood looking at the door, her breath hushed, her cheeks changing, her nervous hands clasped one within the other.

But the footsteps passed the sitting-room. There seemed to be some talking, and then the house subsided into silence. Where was he? Whither had he gone? Not into the dining-room, as Ellen knew, for Mrs. Cumberland might not be awakened. Gradually the idea came creeping in, and then bounded onwards with a flash that, after all, it might not have been Captain Bohun. A faint cry of despair escaped her, and she put her hands up as if to ward off some approaching evil.

But the suspense at least must be put an end to; it was too heavy to bear; and she rang the bell. Ann, who mostly waited on them, answered it.

"For lights, I suppose, Miss Ellen?"

"Yes. Who is it that has just come here in a fly?"

"It's the landlady's son, miss. Such a fine, handsome man!"

When Mrs. Cumberland entered, Ellen sat, pale and quiet, on the low chair. In good truth the inward burden was becoming hard to bear. Mrs. Cumberland remarked that

Captain Bohun had neither come nor written, and she thought it was not good behaviour of him. And, with that, she settled to her evening newspaper.

"Why, Ellen! Here's the death of James Bohun," she presently exclaimed. "He died the day after Arthur left. This accounts for the delay, I suppose."

"Yes," murmured Ellen.

"But not for his not writing," resumed Mrs. Cumberland. "That is very strange. I hope," she added smiling, "that he is not intending to break with you because he is now heir-presumptive to a baronetcy."

Mrs. Cumberland, as she spoke, happened to look over the newspaper at Ellen, and was struck by her face. It was pale as death; the eyes had a kind of wild fear, the lips were trembling.

"My dear child, you surely did not take what I said in earnest! I spoke in jest. Captain Bohun is not a man to behave dishonourably; you may quite rely upon that. Had he come into a dukedom, you would still be made his duchess."

"I think I'll go to bed, if you don't mind

my leaving you alone," said Ellen, faintly. "My head aches."

"I think you had better, then. But you have been tormenting yourself into that headache, Ellen."

To bed ! It was only a figure of speech. Ellen sat up in her room, knowing that neither bed nor sleep could bring her ease—for her dreams these past two nights had been worse than reality. She watched for hours the tossing sea—that had never calmed properly down since the storm.

The morning brought a letter from Captain Bohun. To Mrs. Cumberland ; not to Ellen. Or, rather a note, for it was not long enough to be called a letter. It stated that most urgent circumstances had prevented his returning to Eastsea—and he would write further shortly. He added that he was very unwell, and begged to be remembered to Miss Adair.

To Miss Adair ! The very formality of the message and name—Miss Adair, and not Ellen—told a tale. Something was wrong ; it was evident even to Mrs. Cumberland. The letter was short, constrained, abrupt ; and she turned it about in haughty wonder.

"What can the man mean? *This* is not the way to write, when things are at their present crisis. Here are the ring and licence waiting; here's the clergyman holding himself and the church in readiness from day to day; here are you fretting out your heart, Ellen, and he writes such a note as this! But for its being his own handwriting, I know what I should think."

"What?" asked Ellen, hastily.

"Why, that he is worse than he says. Delirious. Out of his senses."

"No, no; it is not that."

"I think if it's not, it ought to be," sharply retorted Mrs. Cumberland. "We must wait for his next letter, I suppose; there's nothing else to be done."

And they sat down to wait. And the weary days dragged their slow length along.

Any position more cruelly difficult than that of Captain Bohun cannot well be conceived. Madam's communication to him did not stop at the one first revelation; she added another to it. At first there had been no opportunity for more; the train stopped at a branch station just beyond Eastsea, and

the carriage became filled with passengers. Arthur, in his torment, would have put further questions to his mother, praying for confirmation, for elucidation ; but Madam whispered a demand to know whether he was mad, that he should speak *there*, and then turned her back upon him. The people went all the way to London, but, as soon as Arthur had put his mother in a cab, on their way to Sir Nash Bohun's, he began again. The storm that raged at Eastsea had apparently extended its fury to London ; the rain beat, the wind blew in gusts, the streets were as deserted as it is possible for London streets at a busy hour of the afternoon to be. Arthur shuddered a little as he glanced out on the black pools, the splashing mud ; outer influences seemed just now to be nearly as black as his fate.

"Mother, things cannot rest here," he said, putting up both windows with a jerk. "You evaded my questions in the train ; you must answer them now."

"Would you have had me speak before half a dozen people ?—and proclaim to them what I know of that man—William Adair ?"

"Certainly not: but you might have spoken

for my ear alone. Cannot you see how dreadful this suspense must be to me? I am engaged to marry Ellen Adair: if not to-day, some other day. And now you tell me that, which—which—”

Which ought to break it off, he was about to say; but emotion stopped him. He raised his hand and wiped the cold moisture from his forehead. Madam bent down, and kissed his hand. He did not remember to have been kissed by her since he was a child. Her voice took a soft, tender tone; something like tears stood in her eyes.

“I can see how you suffer, Arthur; I am sure you must love her, poor young lady; and I’d give anything not to have to inflict pain or disappointment on you. But what else can I do? You are my son: your interests are dear to me: and I must speak. Don’t you remember how I have always warned you against Miss Adair? But I never suspected there would be cause for it so great as this?”

He did remember it. This new soft mode of Madam’s became her well. In the midst of his own sea of troubles Arthur spared a moment to think he had in a degree misjudged her, and to regret it.

"I cannot understand how so frightful a charge can be brought against Mr. Adair," spoke Arthur. "What you tell me sounds like a fable. I had been given to understand that he and my father were close friends."

"As they were, once."

"And yet you say that he, Mr. Adair, was a—a—"

"A convict," spoke Madam, supplying the words. "I cannot give you details, Arthur: only facts. He was tried, out there, and convicted. He got a ticket-of-leave—which I dare say may not have expired yet."

"And his crime?—What was it?"

"I told you. Forgery."

"Did *you* ever know him?"

"Of course I did: at the time when he was intimate with your father. We never quite knew who he was, Arthur; or who his people were at home, or what had taken him out originally to India; but Major Bohun was unsuspicious as the day, unsuspicious as *you*. There arose great trouble, Arthur; gambling and wickedness, and I can't tell you what: and through it all, nearly up to the last, your father believed in Adair."

"Was he a convict *then*?"



"No, no ; all that came afterwards : not the crime, perhaps, but discovery, trial, and conviction. Arthur—how sorry I am to say it, I can never express—your father's son had better go and marry that miserable drab, than a daughter of William Adair."

She pointed to a poor wretch that was passing. A skeleton of a woman, with a dab of paint on her hollow cheeks, and a tawdry gown trailing in the mud.

Arthur pressed his hands on his temples ; all kinds of confused thoughts were fighting together within his breast.

"Did Mrs. Cumberland know of this ?" he asked.

"I cannot say. *Her husband did.* At the time it all happened, Mrs. Cumberland was away in ill-health. I should think she would hear it from her husband afterwards."

"Then—how could she encourage me to enter into this contract of marriage with Miss Adair ?" returned Arthur, in a flash of resentment.

"You must never see her again, Arthur ; you must never see her again. Go abroad for a time if need be : it may be the better plan."

"What am I to say to them ?" he cried in

self-commune. "After all, Ellen is not responsible for her father's sins."

A spasm of fright caught Madam. Was this information not sufficient?—would he carry out the marriage yet?

"Arthur, there's worse behind," she breathed. "Why can't you be satisfied?—why do you force me to tell you all? I'd have spared you the rest."

"What rest?" he asked, his lips turning white.

"About that man—William Adair."

"What rest?"

"He killed your father."

"Killed—my father?"

"Yes he did. He forged his name; he ruined him: and in the shock—in the shock—he—"

Madam stopped. "What?" gasped Arthur.

"Well, the shock killed your father."

"Do you mean that he died of it?"

"He could not bear the trouble; and he—shot himself."

Madam's face was white now: white with emotion. Arthur, in *his* emotion, seized her hand, and gazed at her.

"It is true," she whispered. "He shot

himself in the trouble and disgrace that Adair brought upon him. And you, his son, would have married the man's daughter!"

With a horrible fear of what he had all but done,—with a remorse that nearly turned him mad,—with a sort of tacit vow never again to see Mrs. Cumberland or Ellen Adair, Arthur Bohun dropped his mother's hand with a suppressed groan, and kept silence until they stopped before the house of Sir Nash Bohun.

Mechanically he looked up at the windows, and saw that the shutters were open. So James was not dead. Arthur gave his hand to Madam, to help her in.

But James Bohun was as ill as he could be. Sinking fast: and very palpably nearer death than when Madam had started from the house at break of dawn. In fact there had then been some hope, for he had rallied in the night. Arthur never knew that. He supposed his mother had truly come off to fetch him, in solicitude that he should be present at the final close: he suspected not that she had frantically hastened down to disturb him in his paradise.

And this was Arthur Bohun's present position. It is not possible (as was just remarked)

to imagine one more cruelly difficult. Bound by every tie of honour to Ellen Adair, only not married to her through a mere chance, she waiting for him now—now, each hour as it passed—to return and complete the ceremony ; and loving her as he should never love any other in this world. And—in the very midst of these obligations—to have made the sudden, and astounding discovery that Ellen Adair was the only woman living who must be barred to him ; whom, of all others, of all the many numbers that walk the earth, he must alone not make his wife. The position would have been bewildering to a man without honour : to Arthur Bohun, with his fastidiously high standard of it, innate in him from his birth, it was simply awful. And the word is not used in its slight and careless sense, as it has become the fashion to use it of late years.

For the few hours that James Bohun lasted, Arthur did nothing. It may almost be said that he *thought* nothing, for his mind was in a chaos of confusion. On the day following his arrival James died : and he, Arthur, was then heir-presumptive. To many, it might have been looked upon that he was quite as secure of the succession as though he were heir-appa-

rent; for Sir Nash was old and ailing. A twelvemonth ago Sir Nash Bohun had been full of life; upright, energetic, to all appearance strong, hearty, and likely to outlive his son. But since then he had changed rapidly: and the once healthy man seemed to have little health in him. Medical men told him that if he would go abroad and partake for some months of certain medicinal springs, he might—and in all probability would—regain his health and strength. Sir Nash would have tried it but for the decaying health of his son. James could not leave home; Sir Nash would not leave him.

What, though Arthur Bohun *was* the heir? In his present distress, it was to him worse than nothing. A Bohun could not live with tarnished honour: and his must be tarnished to the end of his days. To abandon Ellen Adair would bring the red stain of indelible shame to his cheek; to marry her would be, of the two, the worse disgrace. What, then, was the expected rank and wealth to him?—better that he should go out to some land of exile and hide his head for ever.

He knew not what to do; even at this present passing moment, he knew it not. What

*ought* he to do ? Torn with conflicting emotions, now swayed this way, now that, he could not see which way his duty lay in this very present dilemma. Think not that, in saying this, it was the marriage he was in doubt over ; *that* had been given up in his own mind for ever. But what was he to say to Ellen ?—what to Mrs. Cumberland ? Where seek for an excuse or plea for his conduct ? They were expecting him, no doubt, by every train, and he did not go. He did not mean to go. What could he write ?—what say ? On the day of James Bohun's death, he took the pen in his hand and sat down : but he never wrote a word. The true cause he could not urge. He could not say to Ellen, Your father was a convict, he has (or had) a ticket-of-leave, he caused my father's death ; and so our union must not take place. If he merely said, I have heard things against your father, Ellen would naturally ask what things—for that *she* knew nothing of the past or the disgrace attaching to her father, was clear as day. "I tell you these dreadful truths in confidence," Madam had said to Arthur, "you must not speak of them. You might be called upon for proofs—and proofs would be very difficult to obtain at

this distance of time. The Reverend George Cumberland knew all, even more than I ; but he is dead : and it may be that Mrs. Cumberland knows nothing. I should almost think she does not : or she would never have sought to marry you to Adair's daughter. You can only be silent, Arthur ; you must be, for the girl's sake. By speaking merely a hint of what her father was, you would blight her life and prospects. Let her have her fair chance : though she may not marry you, she may be chosen by some one else : don't you be the one to hinder it. If the story ever comes out through others, why—you will be thankful, I dare say, that it was not through you."

And there, listening to this, assenting to it with his whole heart, stood Arthur. *He* speak a word that would blight the life of Ellen Adair ? No : he was blighting it enough himself. But, see you not how this compulsory reticence held him ? He might not assign the true reason for his shameful conduct—and to him it appeared shameful in the worst degree : while he could not find or invent any other plea of excuse.

He sat with the pen in his hand, and did

not write a word. There was no word in the whole English language, or collection of words, that would have served him. "My darling love, Fate has parted us, but I would a great deal rather die than have to write it, and I shall hold you in my heart for ever." Something like that he would have liked to say, had it been practicable. But it was not with romance he had to deal, but with stern reality.

He put the ink and pens up for the day, and lay back in his chair with a face almost as white as that of his dead cousin ; and felt as though he were dying himself. Man has rarely gone through a mental conflict such as this, and come out scatheless. He saw no way out of his dilemma ; no way that was, or could be, open to him.

On the third day he spoke to Sir Nash. It was not that a suspicion of his mother's veracity on this point crossed his mind : it did not : for she had shown too much agitation herself for him to doubt that the revelation was genuine. Therefore, it was not to have the tale confirmed that he spoke, but in the fulness of his bitter heart.

They were alone in the library. Sir Nash



began talking of different things ; of Arthur's probable succession : of his dead son. James, never strong, had worn himself out between philanthropy and close reading, he said. Arthur, he hoped, would take a lesson, embrace rational pursuits, and marry. He, Sir Nash, understood there was a charming young lady waiting to be asked by him ; of good family, of good fortune, everything in her favour : he alluded to Miss Dallory.

" Did you know anything of the cause of my father's death, sir ?" questioned Arthur, who had stood listening in silence, his elbow on the mantel-piece, his hand supporting his brow.

Sir Nash replied by another question : and he glanced keenly at Arthur as he put it.

" Do *you* know ?"

" I always thought that he died of sun-stroke. But my mother has at length disclosed to me the truth. He—died in a different way."

" He shot himself," said Sir Nash, in a low tone. " My brother got suddenly overwhelmed with a load of trouble, and he—he was unable to bear it. Poor Tom !"

Arthur questioned of the particulars : he

was hoping to hear them. But Sir Nash could not tell him a syllable more than he already knew: in fact, the baronet seemed in a fog about it altogether.

"Of course I never got hold of the details as if I had been on the spot, Arthur," he said. "Your poor father fell into the meshes of a villanous scoundrel, one Adair, who had somehow forged his way by false pretences into society—which I suppose is not difficult to do, out there. And this Adair brought some scandalous disgrace on him from which there was no escape; and—and Tom, poor fellow, could not survive it. He was simplicity itself in honour, trusting implicitly, believing all men to be as upright as he, until he found them otherwise. If he had a failing, it was on the side of pride—but I'm afraid most of us Bohuns think too much of that. A less proud man might have got over it. Tom could not. He died, rather than live with his name tarnished."

Arthur Bohun, standing there and looking more like a ghost than a living man, thought of the blow his own honour had just received—the tarnish that would rest on it for aye.

"And you don't know the details, uncle?" he resumed. "I wonder you did not stir in it at the time—and bring Adair to justice."

"On the contrary, we hushed it up. We have never spoken of 'it, Arthur, above our breath. Tom was gone; and it was as well to let it lie. It took place in some out-of-the-way district of India; and the real truth was not known to half a dozen people. The report there was that Major Bohun died of sun-stroke; it spread to Europe, and we let it circulate uncontradicted. Better, we thought, for Tom's little son—you, Arthur—that the real facts of the death should be allowed to rest, if they would rest."

There ensued a pause. Presently Arthur lifted his face; and spoke, as Sir Nash supposed, banteringly. In good truth, it was in desperation.

"It would not do, I suppose, for a gentleman to marry Adair's daughter?"

Sir Nash turned to him quickly. "Why do you ask this? I believe you know the girl."

"I will tell you, Uncle Nash. No one could have been nearer marrying another than I was marrying Ellen Adair. Of course it is at an end: I cannot do it now."

Sir Nash Bohun stared for a minute, as if unable to take in the absurdity of the words. He then drew up his fine old head with a proud dignity.

“Arthur! Arthur Bohun! a gentleman had better do as your poor father did—shoot himself—than marry Ellen Adair.”

And Arthur Bohun, in his bitter misery, wondered whether he had *not* better do it, rather than live the life that must remain to him now.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN THE CHURCHYARD.

NOTHING of late years had affected Mr. North so much as the death of Bessy Rane. The calamity of his son Edmund's death, encompassed though it was by the doubt and trouble connected with the anonymous letter, did not touch him as this did. Perhaps he had been unconscious until now how very dear Bessy was to his heart.

"Why should Bessy have died?" he asked over and over again in his deep distress, the tears rolling down his cheeks. "*She* was not starved; *she* had plenty of stamina to meet it. They had been calling it a famine fever, some of them, but why should a famine fever attack *her*? I knew she was exposed to danger, her husband coming home continually from his fever patients; but if she did take it, why should she not have got over it?"

Others get over it, many of them, most of them ; who have not half the strength or the good constitution that Bessy had. And why, why did she die so soon ?”

No one could answer him. Not even Dr. Rane. Fever was capricious ; attacking badly or lightly at its will, the latter said. And death was capricious, he added in a lower tone, often seizing upon those whom we most care to save.

Dallory in general echoed Mr. North's sentiments. The death of Mrs. Rane—or Bessy North, as many had always continued to call her—was the greatest shock that had fallen on them since the outbreak of the fever. Mrs. Gass, braving infection—but, like Jelly, she did not fear it—went down to Dr. Rane's house on the Monday morning to express her sympathy, and relieve herself of some of her surprise. She felt much grieved, she was truly shocked ; Bessy had always been a favourite of hers ; it seemed impossible to realize the fact that she was dead. Her mental arguments ran very much as did Mr. North's spoken ones—Why should Bessy, well fed, well nourished, have died, when so many half-starved ones recovered ? But the

point that pressed most forcibly on Mrs. Gass was the quickness of the death. None had died so soon after seizure as Bessy, or anything like so soon ; it seemed unaccountable that she should not have battled longer for life.

Phillis received Mrs. Gass in the darkened drawing-room ; her master was out. Dr. Rane could not stay indoors to indulge his grief and play propriety, as most men can ; danger and death were abroad, and the physician had to go forth and try to avert both from others, in accordance with his duty to Heaven and to man. That he felt his loss keenly, people saw ; there was no outward demonstration of it, neither sighs nor tears ; but he seemed like a man upon whom some heavy weight had fallen ; his manner pre-occupied, his bearing almost unnaturally still and calm. Phillis and Mrs. Gass were talking, and, if truth must be told, crying together, when the doctor came in. Phillis, standing by the centre table, had been giving the particulars of the death, so far as she knew them, just as she had given them to Jelly the morning after. Mrs. Gass, seated in the green velvet chair, had untied the

strings of her black bonnet—for she had not come down in satins and birds-of-paradise to-day, but in respectful black—and was wiping her eyes with her broad-hemmed handkerchief while she listened.

The old servant retired at the entrance of her master. He took a seat, and prepared to go through the interview with equanimity, though he heartily wished Mrs. Gass anywhere else. His house was desolate ; infected also ; he thought that visitors, for their own sake and his, had better keep away. They had not met since the death, and Mrs. Gass, though the least exacting woman in the world, took it a little unkindly that he had not been in, knowing he passed her house several times in the day.

In a subdued tone, in accordance with the closed blinds and perhaps with his own heart, Oliver Rane gave to Mrs. Gass a summary of Bessy's illness and death. He had done all he could to keep her in life, he said ; all he could. Seeley had come over to see her once or twice, and knew that nothing more had remained in his power.

“But, doctor, I heard say that on the Friday you told people she was getting bet-



ter and the danger was over," urged Mrs. Gass, with a sob.

"And I thought it was so," he answered. "What I took to be sleepiness from the exhaustion left by the fever, and what Seeley took to be sleepiness—fatigued nature taking rest to renovate itself—must have been the exhaustion of approaching death. We are deceived thus sometimes."

"But, doctor, she never had but a day's fever. Was that enough to kill her from exhaustion?"

"She had a day and a night. But consider how strong the fever was; I never before saw anything like it. We must not always estimate the duration of a fever, Mrs. Gass, in regard to the effect on the patient, so much as its power. I'm sure the shock and surprise to me—speaking only *as* shock and surprise—were worse than they could have been to any one else."

Yes, Mrs. Gass believed that, and warmly sympathized with him. She then expressed a wish to see the coffin. "Would it be well for her to go up?" he asked. "Oh dear yes," Mrs. Gass answered, "she was not afraid of anything;" and the doctor took her up with-

out further hesitation. There was not much danger now, if any, he observed, as he pulled aside the sheet, which still hung there, saturated, for her to enter the gray room. He had fumigated the place well.

Everything was completed. Hepburn's men had been to and fro, and all was finished. The outer coffin was covered with black cloth, bearing the inscription on the lid. Mrs. Gass's eyes fairly gushed out tears as she read it.

“BESSY RANE.

AGED 31.”

“But you have never put the date of the death, doctor!” cried Mrs. Gass, the omission striking her.

“No? True. That's Thomas Hepburn's fault; I left it to him. The man is half crazed just now, what with grief for his brother and fear for himself. It will be put on the grave.”

From Dr. Rane's Mrs. Gass went to Dallory Hall, knowing Madam was absent. Otherwise she'd not have ventured there. And never was guest more welcome to its master. Poor Mr. North spoke out to her all his grief for Bessy, weeping bitterly.

But, of all the people who felt this death, none were affected by it like Jelly. She could not rest; day and night wild thoughts tormented her. The idea at first picked up kept floating through her head, and sometimes she could not get it out for hours: that Mrs. Rane had been shut into her coffin alive; that what she saw was *herself*, and not her spirit—and this, in spite of the discrepancy as to time and possibility. But Jelly knew, that this could not be, and her imagination would go out to another wild improbability, though she did not dare to follow it—that the poor lady had not died a natural death. One night there came surging into Jelly's brain the supposititious case put by Timothy Wilks, that some men might be found who would put their wives out of the way for the sake of getting the tontine money. Jelly tossed from side to side in her uneasy bed, and stared at the candle—for she no longer cared to sleep in the dark—and tried to get rid of the wicked notion. But she never got rid of it again; and when she rose in the morning, pale, and trembling, and weary, she believed that the dread mystery had solved itself to her, and would be found in *this*.

What ought she to do? Going about that day like one in a dream, moping here, halting there, the question perpetually presented itself. Jelly was at her wits' end with indecision: one time (chiefly at night) she'd resolve to tell of the apparition, and of her suspicion of Dr. Rane; by day she would fling the ideas from her, and call herself a fool for yielding to them. Dinah could not make out what ailed her, she was so strange and dull, but privately supposed it might be the state of Mr. Timothy Wilks. For that gentleman was confined to his bed with some attack connected with the liver.

The day of the funeral drew on. Wednesday. It had been a little retarded to allow of the return for it of Richard North. News had been received of him the morning after Bessy's death. It may readily be imagined what Richard's consternation and grief must have been to hear of his sister's death; whom he so recently left well, and happy, and as likely to live as he was.

The funeral was fixed for twelve o'clock. Richard only arrived the same morning at ten. He had been delayed twelve hours by the state of the sea, the Ostend boat not putting out. One cannot control wind and weather; and

sometimes they act for us—as we think—in a spirit of contrariety. Jelly, in the feeling of superstition that lay upon her, thought the elements had been conspiring to keep Richard North back from following one to the grave who had not been sent to it by Heaven.

Long before twelve o'clock struck, groups had formed about the churchyard. The men, out on strike, and their wives, were there in force : partly because it was a break to their monotonous idleness, partly out of respect to their many-years master. The whole neighbourhood sincerely regretted Bessy Rane ; she had never made an enemy in her life.

In the church people of the better class assembled fast, all wearing mourning. Mrs. Gass was in her pew, in an upright bonnet and crape flowers. Seeing Jelly come in, looking very woe-begone, she hospitably opened the pew door to her. And this was close upon the entrance of the funeral.

The first to make his appearance was Thomas Hepburn in his official capacity ; quite as woe-begone as Jelly, and more sickly. The rest followed. The coffin, which Mrs. Gass had seen the other day, and touched, was placed on its stand ; for the few last words of this

and how it was—the staying late at Ketlar's, and Dinah's having left the blind undrawn—that she had come to see it. There she paused.

“Why, what on earth d'ye mean?” sharply demanded Mrs. Gass. “Saw Mrs. Rane's ghost! Don't be an idiot, girl.”

“Yes, I saw it,” repeated Jelly, with quiet emphasis. “Saw it as sure as I see them standing there now to bury her. There could be no mistake. I never saw her plainer in life. It was at one o'clock in the morning, I say, Mrs. Gass; and she was screwed down at twelve: an hour before it.”

“Had you took a drop too much beer?” asked Mrs. Gass after a pause, staring at Jelly to make sure the question would not apply to the present time. But the face that met hers was strangely earnest: too much so even to resent the insinuation.

“It was her ghost, poor thing: and I'm afraid it'll walk till Justice lays it. I never knew but one ghost walk in all my life, Mrs. Gass: and he had been murdered.”

Mrs. Gass made no rejoinder. She was taken up with looking at Jelly. Jelly went on.

“It's said there's many that walk: the world's full of such tales; but I never knew

but that one. When people are put to an untimely end, and buried away out of sight, and their secrets with 'em, it stands to reason that they can't rest quiet in their graves. *She* won't."

Mrs. Gass put her hand with a slap on the black shawl that covered Jelly's arm, and kept it there. "Tell me why you be saying this."

"It's what I want to do. If I don't tell it somewhere I shall soon be in the grave myself. Fancy! me living at the very next door, and nobody in the house just now but Dinah!"

Jelly spoke out all: that she believed Dr. Rane might have "put his wife out of the way." Mrs. Gass was horrified. Not at the charge: she didn't believe a word; but at Jelly's presuming to fancy it. She gave Jelly a serious reprimand.

"It was him that wrote that anonymous letter, you know," whispered Jelly.

"Hush! Hold your tongue, girl. I've warned you before to let that alone."

"And I'm willing."

"This is downright wicked of you, Jelly. Dr. Rane loved his wife. What motive do you suppose he could have had for killing her?"

"To get the tontine money," replied Jelly in a whisper.

The two women gazed at each other ; gaze meeting gaze. And then Mrs. Gass grew on a sudden whiter than Dr. Rane, and began to shiver as though some strange chill had struck her.



## CHAPTER XV.

### IN HIS SICK ROOM.

**L**EANING back on the pillows of an invalid's chair was Arthur Bohun, looking as yellow as gold. He had had an attack of jaundice. The day of James Bohun's funeral it had poured with rain; Arthur got wet, standing at the grave, and caught a chill. It terminated in yellow jaundice—the distressed state of his mind no doubt doing its full part towards bringing on the malady. At first the doctors were afraid of bilious fever, but the danger of that passed. He was recovering now. Sir Nash, at whose house he lay, was everything that was kind.

Madam was kind also: at least she made a great professing show of it. Her private object in life just now was to get her son to marry Miss Dallory. Madam cared no more for her son Arthur or his welfare than she did

for Richard North ; but she had the shrewdness to foresee that the source, whence her large supplies of money had hitherto come, was now dried up : and she hoped to get some out of Arthur for the future. The marrying an heiress, wealthy as Mary Dallory, would vastly increase his power and means of helping her. Moreover, she wished to be effectually relieved from that horrible nightmare that haunted her still—the possibility of his wedding Ellen Adair.

So Madam laid her plans—as it was in her scheming nature ever to be laying them—and contrived to get Miss Dallory (at that time in London with her aunt) to Sir Nash Bohun's for a few days' visit when Arthur was recovering. The young lady was there now ; and Matilda North was there ; and they both spent a good portion of every day with Arthur ; and Sir Nash made much of Mary Dallory, partly because he liked her for herself, and partly because he thought there was a probability that she would be Arthur's wife. During his illness, Captain Bohun had had time to reflect : not only time, but *calmness*, in the lassitude it cast on him mentally and bodily : and he began to see his immediate way somewhat

clearer. To hold off and say nothing, give no explanation to the two ladies at Eastsea, to whom he was acting (as he felt) so base a part, was the very worst form of cowardice; and, though he could not explain to Ellen Adair, he was now anxious to do so to Mrs. Cumberland. Accordingly the first use he made of his partially-recovered health, was to cause writing materials to be put on the bed and pen her a note in very shaky characters. He spoke of his serious illness, stated that certain "untoward circumstances" had occurred to intercept his plans, but that as soon as he was sufficiently well to travel he should beg of her to appoint a time when she could allow him a private conference.

The return post brought him a letter from Ellen. Rather to his consternation. Ellen assumed—not unnaturally, as the reader will find, a page or two further on—that the sole cause of his mysterious absence was illness; that he had been ill from the first, and unable to travel. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAREST ARTHUR,—I cannot express to you what my feelings are this morning; so full of joy, yet full of pain. Oh I cannot tell

you what the past two or three weeks have been to me : looking back, it almost seems a wonder that I *lived* through them. For I thought—I thought—I will not say here what I thought, and perhaps I could not, only that you were never coming more ; and that it was to me agony worse than death. And to hear now that you could not come ; that the cause of your silence and absence has been dangerous illness, brings to me a great sorrow and shame. Oh Arthur, my dearest, forgive me ! Forgive also my writing to you in this free manner ; but it almost seems to me as though you were already my husband. Had you been called away but half an hour later you would have been, and perhaps even might have had me with you in your illness.

“ I should like to write pages and pages, but you may be too ill yet to read much, and so I will stop here. May God watch over you and bring you round again.

“ Ever yours, Arthur, yours only, with the great love of my whole heart,

“ ELLEN ADAIR.”

And Captain Arthur Bohun, in spite of the

cruel fate that had parted them, in spite of his best hope never to see her more, pressed the letter to his heart, and the sweet name, Ellen Adair—sweeter than any he would ever hear—to his lips, and shed tears of anguish over it in the feebleness induced by illness.

They might take Mary Dallory to his room as much as they pleased ; and Matilda might exert her little wiles to subtly praise her, and Madam hers to leave them “accidentally” together ; but his heart was too full of another, and of its own bitter pain, to allow room for as much as a responsive thought to Mary Dallory.

“Arthur is frightfully languid and apathetical !” spoke Miss North one day in a burst of resentment. “I’m sure he is quite rude to me and Mary : he’ll let us sit there by him for an hour, and never speak.”

“Consider how ill he has been—and is,” was the remonstrating answer of Sir Nash.

Mrs. Cumberland’s span of life was drawing into a very narrow space : and it might be that she was beginning to suspect this. For some months she had been getting inwardly

weaker ; but the weakness had for a week or two been visibly and rapidly increasing. The unaccountable behaviour of Captain Bohun had tried her—for Ellen's sake. She was responsible to Mr. Adair for the welfare of his daughter, and the matter was a source of daily and hourly annoyance to her mind. When this second tardy note arrived, she considered it, in one sense, a satisfactory explanation ; in another, not ; since, if Captain Bohun had been too ill to write himself, why did he not get some one else to write to her and say so ? However, she was willing to persuade herself that all would be right ; and she told Ellen, without showing her the note, that Captain Bohun had been dangerously ill, unable to come or write. Hence Miss Ellen's return letter.

But, apart from the silent progress of the illness in itself, nothing had done Mrs. Cumberland so much harm as the news of her daughter-in-law's death. It had been allowed to reach her abruptly, without the smallest warning. I suppose there is something in our common nature that urges us to impart sad tidings to others. We are all alike in it. However grievous and horrible they may be, we

find pleasure in imparting them : and Dinah, Jelly's friend and underling, proved no exception. On the day after the death, she sat down and indited a letter to her fellow-servant, Ann, at Eastsea, in which she detailed the short progress of Mrs. Rane's illness and described the death as "awful sudden." Ann, before she had well mastered the cramped lines, ran with white face and open mouth to her mistress ; and Miss Adair afterwards told her that she ought to have known better. That it was too great a shock for Mrs. Cumberland in her critical state, the girl in her repentance saw. Mrs. Cumberland asked for the letter, and scarcely had it out of her hand for hours and hours. Dead ! apparently from no cause ; for the fever had lasted but a day, Dinah said, and was gone again. Mrs. Cumberland, in her bewilderment, began actually to think it was a fable.

Not for two or three days did she receive confirmation from Dr. Rane. Of course the doctor did not know and did not suppose that any one else would be writing to Eastsea ; and he was perhaps willing to spare his mother the news as long as he could. He shortly described the illness—saying that he,

himself, had entertained but little hope from the first, from the severity of the fever. But all this did not tend to soothe Mrs. Cumberland; and in the two or three weeks that afterwards went on, she faded palpably. Little wonder the impression, that she was growing worse, made its way to Dallory.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### JELLY'S TROUBLES.

WITH the same rapidity, to outer appearance, that the sickness had come on, so did it subside in Dallory. Mrs. Rane's was the last serious case; the last death; the very few attacks afterwards were of the mildest description; and within a fortnight of the time that ill-fated lady was laid in the ground, people were fumigating their houses and throwing their rooms open to the renewed healthy air.

The inhabitants in general, rallying their depressed courage, thought the sooner they forgot the episode the better. Save perhaps by the inmates of those houses from which some one had been taken, they did soon forget it. It was surprising—now that magnifying fear was at an end and matters could be summed up dispassionately—how few the gaps

were. With the exception of Henry Hepburn the undertaker and Mrs. Rane, they lay entirely amidst the poor working people out on strike; and, of those, principally amidst the children. Mrs. Gass told men to their faces that the fever had come of nothing but famine and deprivation, and that they had only themselves to thank for it. She was in the habit, as the reader knows, of dealing out to them some home truths: but she had dealt out something else during the sickness—and that was, good nourishing food. She continued to do so still to those whose frames had been weakened by it: but she gave them due warning that it was only temporary help, which they'd never have received from her but for the fever. And so the visitation grew into a thing of the past, Dallory was itself again.

One, there was, however, who could not get: with whom that unhappy past, or rather a calamity left by it, was present night and day. Jelly. That Dr. Rane had in some way wilfully caused the death of his wife, Jelly was as sure of as though she had seen it done. Her suspicion pointed to laudanum; or to some preparation of the kind. Suspicion? Nay, with her it was a certainty. In that last day of

Bessy Rane's life, when she was described as sleeping, sleeping, always sleeping ; when her sole cry had been—"I am easy, only let me sleep," Jelly now felt that Dr. Rane knew she had been quietly sleeping away to death. Indelibly as though it had been written on her heart with the pen of truth, lay the conviction. About that, there could be neither doubt nor hesitation in her mind : the difficulty was—what ought to be her own course ?

In all Jelly's past life she had never been actually superstitious : if told that she was so now, she would have replied Yes, because circumstances forced it upon her. That Mrs. Rane's spirit had appeared to her that memorable night to one sole intent—namely, that she, Jelly, should avenge her dreadful end by disclosing it to the public, Jelly believed as implicitly as she believed in the Gospel. Not a soul in the whole wide world but herself (save of course Dr. Rane) had the faintest idea that the death was not a natural one. Jelly moaned and groaned, and thought her fate unjustly hard that *she* should have been signalled out by heaven (for that's how she solemnly put it) for the revelation, when there were so many other people in the community of Dallory.

Jelly had fits of real despondency, when she didn't quite know whether her head was on or off, or whether her mind wouldn't "go." Why couldn't the ghost have appeared to somebody else, she mentally asked at these moments : to Phillis, say ; or to Dinah ; or to Seeley the surgeon ; just because she had been performing an act of charity in sitting-up with Ketlar's sick child, it must show itself to *her* ! And then Jelly's brain would go off into suppositions, that it might have puzzled one, wiser than she was, to answer. Suppose she had not been at Ketlar's that night, the staircase blind would have been drawn down at dusk as usual, she would have gone to bed at her customary hour, seeing nothing, and been spared all this misery. But no. It was not to be. She went to Ketlar's ; she stayed with the sick child to a strangely late hour, because Ketlar himself was detained out : when she reached home she found no light placed for her ; she found the blind not down, both through Dinah's omission : and so—she saw what she did see. And although Jelly, in her temper, might wish to throw the blame on Ketlar for staying out, and on Dinah for her negligence, she recognized the finger of Destiny

in all this, and knew she could not have turned aside from it.

*What* was she to do? Living in mortal dread of seeing again the apparition, feeling somehow a certainty within herself that she should see it, Jelly pondered the question every hour of the day. Things could not rest as they were. On the one hand, there was her natural repugnance to denounce Dr. Rane (just as there had been in the case of the anonymous letter), not only because she was in the service of his mother, but for his own sake; for Jelly, with all her faults, as to curiosity and the like, had not a bad heart. On the other, there was the weighty secret revealed to her by the dead woman—and the expression is not wrong, for, *but* for that apparition Jelly would have known no more than the rest of the world—and the obligation it laid upon her. Yet—*how* could she speak?—when the faintest breath of such an accusation against her son, would assuredly kill Mrs. Cumberland in her present critical state! and to Jelly she was a good and kind mistress. No, she could never do it. With all this conflict within her, no wonder Jelly lost flesh and appetite: she had been thin enough before,

she was like a veritable skeleton now. As to the revelation to Mrs. Gass, Jelly might just as well have made it to the moon. For that lady, after the first shock was passed, absolutely refused to give credence to the tale: and had appeared ever since, by her manner, to ignore it as completely as though it had never been spoken.

Gradually Jelly grew disturbed by another fear—that she might be taken up as an accomplice after the fact. She was sure she had heard of such cases: and she tormented Tim Wilks nearly out of his patience—that gentleman having recovered his temporary indisposition—by asking perpetual questions of what the law might do to a person who found out that another had committed some crime, and concealed the knowledge: say stole a purse, for instance, and kept the money—for that's how Jelly generally put it.

One night, when Jelly, by some fortunate chance, had really got to sleep early—for she more often lay awake till morning light—a ring at the door-bell suddenly aroused her. Mrs. Cumberland had caused a loud night-bell to be affixed to the door: in case of fire, she said: it hung on this first landing, close, so to say, to Jelly's head, so that she awoke instantly.

Dinah, sleeping above, might have heard it just as well as Jelly; but Dinah was a hard sleeper—most people are so who have plenty of work to do and nothing to worry them—and the bell, as Jelly knew, might ring for an hour before it awoke her. However, Jelly lay still, not caring to get up herself, hoping against hope, and wondering who in the world could be ringing, unless it was somebody mistaking their house for Dr. Rane's. Which had happened before.

Ring; ring. It was not a loud ring by any means; but a gentle one, as if the applicant did it in deprecation. Jelly lay on. She was not afraid that it was connected with the sight she was always in mortal dread of again seeing, since ghosts don't come ringing to announce their visits, after the manner of men and women. In fact, the surprise, and the speculating who it could be, put the fear for the time being altogether out of Jelly's head.

Ring; ring; ring. Rather a louder peal this turn, as if a little impatience mingled with the deprecation.

"Drat that girl!" cried Jelly in her wrath, finding that she must get up after all.

Flinging on a warm shawl, and putting her

feet into her shoes, Jelly proceeded to the front room—Mrs. Cumberland's chamber when she was at home—threw up the window, and called out to know who was there. A little man, stepping back from the door into the bright moon-light, looked up to answer—and Jelly recognized the form and voice of Ketlar.

“It's me,” said he.

“You!” interrupted Jelly, not allowing the man to continue. “What on earth do you want here at this hour?”

“I came to tell you the news about poor Cissy. She's dead.”

“Couldn't it wait?” tartly returned Jelly, overlooking the sad nature of the tidings in her anger at being disturbed out of her bed. “Would it have run away, that you must come and knock folks up to tell it as if you'd been the telegraph?”

“It was my wife made me come,” spoke Ketlar, with much humility. “She's in a peck o' grief, Jelly, and nothing 'ud do but I must come right off and tell you; she thought, mayhap, you'd not be gone to bed.”

“Not gone to bed at twelve o'clock at night!” retorted Jelly. “And there it is,



striking : if you've got any ears to hear. You must be a fool, Ketlar."

"Well, I'm sorry to have disturbed you," said the man, with a sigh. "I'd not have done it of myself ; but poor Susan was taking on so, I couldn't say her nay. We was all of us so fond of the child : and—and—"

Ketlar broke down with a great sob. The man had loved his child : and he was weak and faint with hunger. It a little appeased Jelly : not very much.

"I suppose you don't expect me to dress myself and come off to Susan at this hour?" she resentfully exclaimed, her tone, however, not quite so sharp.

"Law bless you, no," answered Ketlar. "What good would that do ? It couldn't bring Cissy back to life."

"Ketlar, it's just this—instead of being upset with grief, you and Susan, you might be thankful that the child's taken out of the distress of this world. She won't cry for food where she's gone, and find none."

The man's sobs were renewed at the last suggestion. But Jelly had really meant it in the light of consolation.

"She was your god-child, Jelly."

"You needn't tell it me," answered Jelly. "Could I have saved her life at any trouble or cost, I'd not have grudged it. If I had a home of my own I'd have taken her to it, but I'm only in service, as you know. Ketlar, it is the strike that has killed that child."

Ketlar answered nothing.

"Cissy was a weakly child and required extra comforts; as long as you were in work she had them, but when that dropped off—leastways, when *you* dropped it, I should say," amended Jelly, who did not let the opportunity slip for dealing out a modicum of reproach—"of course the child suffered. And now she's gone. She is better off, Ketlar."

"Yes," assented the man as if he were heart-broken. "If it wasn't for the thought of the rest, I wish it was me that was gone instead."

"Well, give my love to Susan, and say I'm sorry for it altogether, and I'll come down sometime in the morning. And, look here, Ketlar—what about the money for the burial? You've not got anything towards it, I expect."

Ketlar caught up his breath. "Not a penny."

"Well, I know you'd not like the poor

little thing to be buried by the parish, so I'll see what's to be done, tell Susan. Good night."

Jelly shut down the window with a bang. She really looked upon the strike as having led to the child's death—and in a remote degree possibly it had ; so, what with that, and what with the untimely disturbance from her bed, her tartness of manner was somewhat excusable.

In passing back across the landing to her own chamber, with no more superstitious thoughts in her mind just then than if she had never had cause to entertain such, the large window became suddenly illuminated. Jelly stopped. Her heart, as she would herself have expressed it, leaped into her mouth. The light came from the outside ; no doubt from Dr. Rane's. Jelly stood stock still. And then—what desperate courage impelled her she never knew, but believed afterwards it must have been something akin to the fascination of the basilisk—she advanced to the window, and pulled aside the white blind.

But she did not see Bessy Rane this time, as perhaps she had expected ; only her husband. Dr. Rane had a candle in his hand,

and was apparently picking up something he had let fall quite close to the large opposite window. It was this candle that had lighted up Jelly's window. In another moment he lodged the candle on a chair that stood there, so as to have both hands at liberty. Jelly watched. What he had dropped appeared to be several articles of his deceased wife's clothing, some of which had come unfolded in the fall. He soon had them within his arm again, caught up the candle, and went downstairs. Jelly saw and recognized one beautiful Indian shawl, scarlet with a gold border, which had been a present from her own mistress to Bessy.

"He is going to pack them up and sell them, the wicked man!" spoke Jelly, in her strong conviction. And her ire grew very great against Dr. Rane. "I'd almost rather have seen the spirit of his poor wife again than *this*," was her bitter comment, as she finally went into her room.

Putting aside all the solemn doubts and fears that were making havoc with Jelly's mind, her curiosity was insatiable. Perhaps no woman in all Dallory had so great a propensity for prying into other people's affairs

as she. Not, it must be again acknowledged, to do them harm, but simply in her world-wide inquisitiveness.

On the following morning, when Jelly attired herself to go to Ketlar's after breakfast—which meal was seasoned throughout with reproaches to Dinah for not hearing the night-bell—she bethought herself that she could first of all step into the next door. Ostensibly for the neighbourly object of informing Phillis of the death of the child; really, to pick up any items of information there might be to pick up. Dr. Rane, it may be here remarked, had given Molly Green a character to get herself another place, himself preferring to retain the elder servant, Phillis, who, however, only went to him by day. The doctor was alone in his house at night, and Jelly believed he dared not have even old Phillis in, knowing it was haunted. He made no secret now of his intention to quit Dallory. As soon as his practice should be disposed of, and the tontine money paid, away he would go.

Jelly coolly walked out of the window of Mrs. Cumberland's dining-room, and through that of the doctor's. She had seen him go

out some little time before. Phillis was upstairs, putting her master's chamber to rights, and Jelly sought her there. She told of the fright Ketlar had given her by coming at midnight to bring the news about Cissy; and Phillis, who had a tender heart, dropped a tear or two to the child's memory. Cissy had been loved by everybody.

"Miss Dallory will be sorry to hear this when she comes back," remarked Phillis.

"I say, Phillis, what does your master mean to do with Mrs. Rane's clothes?" abruptly asked Jelly.

Phillis, dusting the looking-glass at the moment, paused in her occupation, as if considering.

"I'm sure I don't know, Jelly. He pointed out a few of the plain things to me one day, and said I might divide them between myself and Molly Green, but that he'd not like to see us wear them till he was gone away. As of course we shouldn't, being in black for her."

"She had lots of beautiful clothes. I'm sure the shawls, and scarfs, and embroidered robes, and worked petticoats, and other valuable Indian things that my mistress was always

giving her, would have set up any lady's wardrobe. What will he do with *them*?"

Phillis shook her head, and pointed to a large, high chest of drawers. Her heart was full yet when she spoke of her late mistress.

"They are all in there, Jelly."

Are they, thought Jelly. But Phillis was going down now, her occupation finished. Jelly lingered behind, and thrust her black bonnet out at the window, as if looking at something up the road. When Phillis had descended the stairs, Jelly tried the drawers. All were locked except one. That one, which Jelly softly drew open, was filled with articles belonging to the late Mrs. Rane; none of them, so far as Jelly could gather by the cursory glance and touch, of much value.

"Yes," she said bitterly. "He keeps these open for show, but he is sending away the best. Those other drawers, if they could be looked into, are empty."

If ever Jelly had been startled in all her life at human footstep, it was to hear that of Dr. Rane on the stairs. How she got the drawer shut, how she got her bonnet stretched out at the window again as far as ever it

would stretch, she hardly knew. The doctor came in. Jelly, bringing in her head, apparently as much surprised as if a rhinoceros had walked up, apologised and explained rather lamely. She supposed Phillis must have gone down, she said, while she was watching that impudent butcher's boy; she had made bold to step up to tell Phillis about Ketlar's little girl.

"Ah, she is gone," observed Dr. Rane, as Jelly was walking out. "There has been no hope of her for some time."

"No, sir, I know there hasn't," replied Jelly, somewhat recovering her equanimity. "I told Ketlar that he may thank the strike for it."

Jelly got out with this, and was whisking through the gray room, when the doctor spoke again.

"Have you heard from your mistress this morning, Jelly?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I have. I am very much afraid that she is exceedingly ill, Jelly?"

"Dinah got a letter from Ann a day or two ago, sir; she said in it that her missis was



looking worse, and seemed lower than she'd ever known her."

"Ay, I wish she would come home. East-sea is far away, and I cannot be running there perpetually," added the doctor, as he shut the chamber door in Jelly's face.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### COMING HOME TO DIE.

TIME went on again; nearly a fortnight. Dallory had relapsed into its old routine, and the fever was forgotten. Houses had recovered the smell of soap and scrubbing; their inhabitants were back again; and amidst them Mrs. North and her daughter Matilda.

The chief news Madam found to interest her was, that Richard North had opened the works again. The glow of hope it raised within her was bright indeed; for she looked upon it as an earnest that supplies would come in again for the future as they had in the past. That she would find herself mistaken was exceedingly probable; Richard himself could have said a certainty. Madam had the grace to express some calm regret for the untimely death of Bessy, in the hearing

of Mr. North and Richard ; she had put herself and Matilda into deeper mourning than they had assumed for James Bohun. It was all of the most fashionable and costly kind ; and the master of Dallory Hall, poor helpless man, had the pleasure of receiving the bills for it from the London court-milliners and dressmakers. But Madam never enquired into the particulars of Bessy's illness and death ; in her opinion the less fevers were talked of the better.

Yes ; the North works were re-opened. Or, to be quite correct, they were close on the point of it. Upon how small a scale he must begin again, Richard, remembering the magnitude of past operations, felt almost ashamed to think. But, as he good-humouredly remarked, half a loaf was better than no bread. He must get a living ; he had not a fortune in the bank, or elsewhere, to fly to ; and he preferred doing this to seeking employment under other firms, if indeed anything worth having had been to be found ; but the country's trade was in a most depressed state, and hundreds of gentlemen, like himself, had been thrown out. It was the same thing as beginning life over again ; just a little ven-

ture, that might succeed or might not; one in which he must plod on carefully and cautiously, even to keep it going.

The whole staff of operatives would at first be under twenty men. The old workmen, idly airing themselves still in North Inlet, laughed derisively when they heard this. Twenty men, indoor and out, including the master himself, in that there big block o' buildings, they shouted to one another. What was they a-going to make—wheelbarrers?—bridges for dogs to trot across?—railway carriages to carry dolls? The men were pleasantly sarcastic over it, thinking perhaps they concealed their real bitterness of heart. The new measure did not find favour with them. How should it, when they stood in the light of excluded parties? Some eight or ten, who had never been willing upholders of the strike, who had been ready to return to work all along, would be taken on again; the rest, foreigners, Richard North was bringing over from abroad. And the ire of the disaffected was great.

Truly the men were like the dog in the manger—as Richard North formerly told them. They would not do the work themselves: had Richard now again offered it to

them, they would have declined it, as before : and yet they wished to prevent others doing it. Ay, and intended to prevent, luck being good for it. The strike and its disastrous accompaniments seemed to have wholly changed the character of these poor mistaken operatives. They used, speaking of them as a whole, to be as respectable and civil and sensible a body of men as one could wish to find ; but now they were sullen and depressed, almost ferocious, next door to desperate. Out at pocket and elbows ; out of hope and heart ; their homes were desolate, their wives resentful, their children ragged, sickly, dying. Neither men nor women, neither growing children nor infants, ever knew now what it was to have a substantial meal of good wholesome food. And of course the question lay heavily on the minds of the most thoughtful—Where and in what way was it to end ? Richard North had told them—in starvation, or the workhouse ; and the prospect looked nearer now than it had then. The only thing money seemed to be found pretty readily for, was tobacco : since the men might still be seen with their pipes. Beer also could be bought occasionally—and perhaps they re-

quired it, in their state of long-continued, incipient famine.

Mrs. Gass entered cordially into Richard's plans. She would have put money wholesale into his new undertaking—or, as she generally expressed it, his new venture ; and in truth it might be called new, and a venture also. But Richard would not have it. Some portion of her capital that had been embarked in the firm of North and Gass, remained in it of necessity—all, in fact, of it that was not lost—but this she reckoned as nothing, and wanted to help Richard further. "It's o' no good crying after spilt milk, Mr. Richard," she said to him, philosophically ; "and I've still got a deal more than I shall ever want." But Richard was firm : he would not be helped further : it was a risk, and he preferred to incur it alone.

Perhaps there were few people living that Richard North liked better than Mrs. Gass. He even liked her homely mode of speech ; it was honest, genuine ; far more to be respected than if she had made a show of attempting what she could not have kept up. Richard had grown to know her worth : he recognized it more surely day by day. In his uncom-

fortable home at Dallory Hall—which had long to him been anything but a home—he had got into the habit of almost making a second one with Mrs. Gass. Never a day passed but he spent an hour or two of it with her ; and she would coax him to remain for meals as often as she could.

He sat one afternoon at her well-spread tea-table. His arrangements were pretty well organized now ; and in a day the works would open. The foreign workmen had come, and were lodged with their families in the places appointed for them. Two policemen, paid by Richard, had also taken up their position in Dallory, purposely to protect them. Of course the object of the officers was not made known : Richard North would not be the one to provoke hostilities, or even let it be suspected he feared them ; but he was quite aware of the ill-feeling obtaining amidst his former workmen.

“Blessed idiots, they be !” said Mrs. Gass, confidentially, as she handed Richard a cup of tea. “They want a lesson read to ’em, Mr. Richard ; that’s what it is.”

“I can’t tell about that,” dissented Richard. “I should have thought they could hardly

find a better lesson than these last few months must have been."

"Ah, you don't know 'em, as I do, Mr. Richard. I'm a'most double your age, sir; and there's nothing gives one experience like years."

Richard laughed. "Not double my age yet, old friend."

"Any ways, I might have been your mother—if you'll excuse my saying of it," she persisted. "You be hard upon thirty-three, and I'm two years turned fifty."

It was in this plain manner that Mrs. Gass usually liked to make her propositions so undeniable. Certainly she might, so far as age went, have been Richard's mother.

"I know them men better than you do, Mr. Richard; and I say they want a lesson read to 'em yet. And they'll get it, sir. But we'll leave the subject for a bit, if you please. I've been tired of it for some time past, and I'm sure you have. To watch men, once sensible, act like fools, and persist in acting, spite of everybody and everything, is wearying to one's patience. Is it to-morrow that you open?"

"The day after."



"Well, now, Mr. Richard, I'd like to say another word upon a matter that you and me don't agree on—and it's not often our opinions differs, is it sir? It's touching your capital. I know you'll want more than you can command: it would give me a real pleasure if you'll let me find it."

Richard smiled, and shook his head decisively. "I cannot say more about it than I have said before," was his reply. "You know all I have urged."

"Look here: promise this," returned Mrs. Gass. "If ever you find yourself at a pinch as things go on, say you'll come to me. I don't ask you, should the concern turn out a losing one, a hopeless one (which I know it won't, unless them precious Trades' Union men sets it a-fire, like the incendiaries they are, and I can call 'em nothing better), for in that case I know cords wouldn't draw you to have help from me. But when you are getting on, and money would be useful, and its employment safe and sure, I shall look for you to come to me. Now, that's enough. I want to put a question, Mr. Richard, that delicacy has kept me from bothering you with before. What

about their expenses at Dallory Hall? *You* can't pretend to keep 'em up."

"Ah," said Richard, "that has been my great nightmare. But I think I see a way through it—at least, in my own mind. First of all, I have given notice to Miss Dallory that we shall not require the lease renewed: it will be up, you know, next March."

"Good," observed Mrs. Gass.

"My father knows nothing of it—it is of no use to trouble him earlier than need be; and of course Madam does not. *She* imagines that the lease will be renewed as a matter inevitable. Miss Dallory will, at my request, keep counsel—or, rather, her brother Francis for her, for it is he who transacts her business."

"They know then that you are the real lessee of Dallory Hall? Lawk a mercy, what a simpleton I be!" broke off Mrs. Gass. "Of course they must have knowed it when the transfer was made."

Richard nodded. "As soon as Christmas turns I shall begin to look out for a moderate house in lieu of the Hall; one that I shall have hopes of being able to keep up. It shall have a good garden for my father's sake. There'll be frightful rebellion on the part of Madam

and Matilda, but I can't help that. I cannot do more than my means will allow."

"Look here, Mr. Richard; don't you worry yourself about not being able to keep up a house for Mr. North. I'll do my part to that: all of it, if need be. He and my husband were partners and friends, and grew rich together. Mr. North has lost his savings, but I have kept mine; and I shall never see him wanting in any comfort while he lives. We'll look out for a pretty villa-cottage with a lovely garden; and he'll be happier in it than he has ever been in that grand big Hall. If Madam don't like to bring her pride down to it, let her be off elsewhere—and a good rid-dance of bad rubbish! I say, though, Mr. Richard, have you heard the news about Mary Dallory?"

"What news?" he asked.

"That she's going to be married to Captain Bohun."

Richard North drank down his tea at a gulp. His face had flushed a little.

"I hear, that Madam wishes it, and is working for it," he answered. "Miss Dallory was staying with them when they were at Sir Nash Bohun's."

"I know that Madam has given it out that they're going to marry one another," rejoined Mrs. Gass. "By the way, Mr. Richard, how is Captain Bohun getting on, after his fit of the jaunders?"

"He is better. Nearly well."

Mrs. Gass took a good bite of buttered toast. "I shall believe in that there marriage when it has taken place, Mr. Richard; not before. Unless I'm uncommonly out, Captain Bohun cares for another young lady too well to think of Mary Dallory. Folks mayn't suspect it; and I b'lieve don't. But I have had my eyes about me."

Richard knew that she alluded to Ellen Adair.

"They are both as sweet and good girls as ever lived, and a gentleman may think himself lucky to get either of 'em. Mr. Richard, your coat-sleeve is a-touching of the potted-ham."

Richard smiled a little as he wiped his cuff. Mourning was always bad wear, he remarked, showing every little stain. And then he said a few words about her for whom it was worn—which he had rarely done since she died.

"I cannot get reconciled to her death," he said in a low tone. "At times can scarcely

believe in it. To have been carried off after only a day of fever! it seems incredible."

And Mrs. Gass felt that the words startled her to tremor. She turned away lest he should see it in her countenance.

Bad news arrived from Mrs. Cumberland. Only a morning or two later, a thundering knock at the front door disturbed Jelly and Dinah at their breakfast. Upon its being opened by the latter, Dr. Rane walked straight into the kitchen without ceremony, an open letter in his hand. Jelly rose and curtsied. She had been markedly respectful to the doctor of late, perhaps in very fear lest he should suspect the curious things her mind was running on.

"My mother will be home to-night, Jelly."

"To-night, sir!" exclaimed Jelly in her surprise.

"She is much worse. Very ill indeed. She says she is coming home to die."

Jelly shrieked: startled out of her equanimity.

"It is only three lines—she writes herself," continued Dr. Rane, just showing the letter in his hand, as if in confirmation. "They

were to go to London yesterday, stay there the night, and will come home to-day. Of course you will have all things in readiness."

"Yes, sir. And what about meeting my mistress at the station?"

"I shall go myself," said Dr. Rane.

He went away with the last words. Jelly sat still for a few minutes to digest the news, and came to the conclusion that "coming home to die" was but a figure of speech of Mrs. Cumberland's. Then she rose up to begin her preparations, and overwhelmed the bewildered Dinah with fifteen orders at once.

During the day, Jelly, in pursuance of something or other she wanted, was walking at a sharp pace towards Dallory, when in passing the Hall gates she found herself accosted by Mrs. North. Madam was taking her usual promenade in the grounds, and had extended it to the gates. Jelly stood still in sheer amazement; it was the first time within her recollection that Madam had condescended to address herself or any other inhabitant of the neighbourhood.

How was Mrs. Cumberland?—and *where* was she? Madam graciously asked. And Jelly,

in the moment's haste, answered that she was at Eastsea.

"To stay the winter, I believe," went on Madam. "And Miss Adair—is she with her?"

"I ought to have said *was* at Eastsea," corrected Jelly, who did not like Madam well enough to be more than barely civil. "My mistress is worse, and is coming home to-day. Miss Adair is with her of course. I must wish you good morning, Madam, I've got my work before me." And away went Jelly, leaving Madam a mental compliment:

"Nasty proud cat! she had got some sly motive for asking, I know."

And so the day went on.

The early dusk of the autumn evening was beginning to fall, together with a storm of rain, when the carriage containing Mrs. Cumberland stopped at her door. Jelly ran out; and was met by Ellen Adair; who spoke in a frightened whisper:

"Oh Jelly, she is so ill! she cannot speak."

The doctor stood helping his mother out. Ann was gathering small articles in her arms from beside the driver. Jelly caught one glimpse of her mistress's face and fell back in

alarm. Surely that blue look was for death!

"She ought not to have come," murmured Dr. Rane in Jelly's ear. "Go and ask Seeley to step over—while I get my mother upstairs."

There was some bustle and confusion for the time. Mrs. Cumberland was put in the easy-chair in her room, and undressed, so far as her bonnet and travelling wraps went. She refused to go to bed. In half an hour or so, when she had somewhat recovered the fatigue, she looked and seemed considerably better, and spoke a little, expressing a wish for some tea. The doctors left her to take it, enjoining strict quiet. Jelly knelt down before her mistress, to hold the cup and saucer.

"What did she die of, Jelly?" came the unexpected question.

"Who?" asked Jelly, wonderingly.

Mrs. Cumberland made a motion in the direction of her son's house: she and her voice were alike of the faintest. "Bessy Rane."

Jelly gave a start that went well-nigh to upset the tea. She felt her face growing white: but she could not move to hide it.



"Why don't you speak? What did she die of?"

"Ma'am, don't you know? She caught the fever."

"It troubles me, Jelly; it troubles me. I've done nothing but dream of her ever since. And what will Oliver do without her?"

The best he can, Jelly had a great mind to answer. But all she said, was, to beg her mistress to leave these questions until the morning.

"I don't think any morning will dawn for me," was Mrs. Cumberland's remark. "I sent you word I was coming home to die. I wanted to come for many reasons. I knew the journey would do me harm; I put it off too long. But I had to come home: I could not die away from it."

Every consoling thing that Jelly could think of, she said, assuring her mistress it was nothing but the journey that put her on to these low thoughts.

"I want to see Mr. North," resumed Mrs. Cumberland. "You must go and bring him to me."

"Not to-night," said Jelly.

"To-night. Now. There's no time to lose."

To see him was one of the things I had to come home for."

And Mrs. Cumberland, ill though she was, was resolute to be obeyed as ever she had been in her days of health. Jelly had the sense to know that refusal would excite her worse than any result of compliance, and prepared to obey. As she passed out of the presence of Mrs. Cumberland, she saw Ellen Adair sitting on the stairs, anxiously listening for any sound from the sick room that might tell how all was going on within it.

"Oh Miss Ellen! You should not be there."

"I cannot rest anywhere, Jelly. I want to know how she is. She is my only friend on this side of the wide world."

"Well now, Miss Ellen, look here—you may come in and stay with her, while I am away; I was going to call Ann. But mind you don't talk."

Flinging on a shawl, Jelly started on the run for Dallory Hall. It was an inclement night, pouring with rain. And Ellen Adair took up her place in obedient silence by the side of the dying woman—for she *was* dying, however ignorant they might be of the fact.

Apart from Ellen's natural grief for Mrs. Cumberland, thoughts of what her own situation would be, if she lost her, could but intrude on her mind, bringing all kinds of perplexity. It seemed to her that she would have neither home nor protector.

END OF VOL. II.

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